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**THE SONNETS**  
**OF**  
**JOHN MILTON.**







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THE  
SONNETS

OF  
JOHN MILTON

*Edited by* MARK PATTISON



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## **INTRODUCTION.**



## INTRODUCTION.

**THE** Sonnet—both thing and name—comes to us from the Italian. It 'sonetto' is the diminutive of 'suono' = sound. In early Italian 'sonare' = 'to play upon an instrument,' as Boccaccio, Nov. 97, 'Avviso che la Lisa volesse per udirlo alquanto e sonare e cantare.' Ballata, sonetto, canzone, were originally distinguished thus: canzone = words merely sung; sonetto = words with instrumental accompaniment; ballata = words accompanied with dancing. But already in Dante's time the three terms had come to denote only three different forms of poem. 'Qui-

‘dam per cantiones, quidam per ballatas,  
‘quidam per sonitus, quidam per alios  
‘illegitimos et irregulares modos.’ *De  
vulgari eloquio.* Just so, in the English  
of to-day, ballad, sonnet, song, dis-  
criminate three different poetic forms. Of  
these forms, those which are denoted by  
ballad and song are loosely defined; the  
sonnet is understood more strictly; and  
its rules, as generally acknowledged,  
admit of being laid down with more  
precision than those of any other form  
of poem in our language.

These rules are;

1. *Formal.*

a. As to length; a sonnet must con-  
sist of fourteen lines, neither more nor  
less.

b. The lines must be lines of five  
beats or metrical accents.

c. As to arrangement; the lines must  
rhyme.

*d.* In disposition of the rimes the whole sonnet may be regarded as composed of two systems; the first eight lines forming one system, and the remaining six the other. The first system of eight lines is composed of two quatrains; the second system of two tercets.

*e.* The two quatrains of the first system must contain only two rimes, which should be thus disposed; Lines 1, 4, 5, 8, must rime together; lines 2, 3, 6, 7, must also rime together.

The arrangement of the quatrains may be represented thus—

A B B A          A B B A. ✓

*f.* The two tercets may contain either two rimes or three rimes. Thus, *e.g.*, they may be either,

C D          C D          C D,

or,

C D E          C D E.

*g.* The rimes in the tercets must not

be on the same combination of consonants, nor even on the same vowel assonances as those in the quatrains. Let Shakspeare's Sonnet 55 be read aloud, and it will be felt how much the numbers lose by this fault; *enmity* and *posterity* being tercet rimes, following upon *masonry* and *memory* in the quatrains.

4. The disposition of the rimes in the tercets must be such as not to reproduce the disposition of those in the quatrains. For example; the following arrangement of the tercets,

C D C            C D C,

is not admissible, because the sequence

D C            C D

has already been twice repeated in the quatrains.

5. Double rimes, which are the rule in the Italian sonnet, are prohibited in the English sonnet by the character of

the language. The rime beat of even single lines, recurring thickly as it does do in the sonnet, is already sufficiently suspensive of the flow of feeling. Double rimes overweight the ends of the lines, and produce in so confined a space what Henri de Croy calls a 'volée de resonance.'

k. The two last lines of a sonnet must not rime together. The principle of the sonnet structure is continuity of thought and metre; the final couplet interrupts the flow, it stands out by itself as an independent member of the construction; the wave of emotion, instead of being carried on to an even subsidence, is abruptly checked and broken as against a barrier.

## 2. *Material.*

a. A sonnet, like every other work of art, must have its unity. It must be the

expression of one, and only one, thought or feeling.

*b.* This thought or mood should be led up to, and opened in the early lines of the sonnet ; strictly, in the first quatrain ; in the second quatrain the hearer should be placed in full possession of it.

*c.* After the second quatrain there should be a pause, not full, nor producing the effect of a break, as of one who had finished what he had got to say, and not preparing a transition to a new subject, but as of one who is turning over what has been said in the mind to enforce it further.

*d.* The opening of the second system, strictly the first tercet, should turn back upon the thought or sentiment, take it up and carry it forward to the conclusion.

*e.* The conclusion should be a resultant summing the total of the suggestion in the preceding lines, as a lake-



let in the hills gathers into a still pool the running waters contributed by its narrow area of gradients.

f. While the conclusion should leave a sense of finish and completeness, it is necessary to avoid anything like epigrammatic point. By this the sonnet is distinguished from the epigram. In the epigram the conclusion is everything; all that goes before it is only there for the sake of the surprise of the end, or *dénouement*, as in a logical syllogism the premisses are nothing but as they necessitate the conclusion. In the sonnet the emphasis is nearly, but not quite, equally distributed, there being a slight swell, or rise, about the middle. The sonnet must not advance by progressive climax, or end abruptly; it should subside, and leave off quietly.

g. The narrow compass of the sonnet, restricted to fourteen lines, necessitates

the observance of other restraints. Such is ; That no word—particles, auxiliaries, or familiar epithets are not reckoned—should occur twice unless where some peculiar effect is aimed at by the repetition.

k. Again ; A feeble or expletive line cannot be tolerated, though in longer compositions such lines are not only permissible, but are often of use as a relief to the attention, while they sustain the rhythm to the ear.

z. It is hardly proper to add, though some treatises on Poetics do, that there should not be an obscure line. Obscurity is a fault in any writing, prose or verse. But in a short poem, such as a sonnet, an obscure line is not only lost itself, it diffuses dimness over the whole piece. The intellect of the hearer has not space to recover from the perplexity into which it has been thrown, before the end of

the poem is reached. This, as one of the most obvious faults of a sonnet, was perceived by George Gascoigne, the first who in English attempted, 1575, to give rules for verse composition. There are only two things of which Gascoigne warns the writer to beware, and obscurity is one of them. 'Take heed that varietie of devise do not carry you from it, for as to use obscure and dark phrases in a pleasant sonnet is nothing delectable, so to intermingle sorry jests in a serious matter is an indecorum.' Notwithstanding the obviousness of this fault, it became the commonest error of the early sonneteers. Shakspeare's sonnets are largely infected by an obscurity arising from over-ingenuity.

In this last rule, *i*, we are on the verge of precepts which apply to all poetry as much as to this special poem—the son-

net. On this ground, that of their being of too general power, we must not add to the rules of the sonnet such requirements as, That it shall consist of imagery; That it shall be fervid in feeling; concrete, and not abstract, in its terms.

The form of sonnet above defined is the most perfect form of the poem. How far any given specimen may deviate from type without ceasing to be a sonnet is as impossible to decide as it is in botany to draw the line between a variety and a distinct species. Perhaps we may say, that success is the best test, and that a brilliant example justifies its own structural form. Or we may look for legislative sanction in consent, and demand compliance with those rules which the majority of poets agree to respect. 'The mighty masters are a law unto themselves, and the validity of their legislation will be attested

‘and held against all comers by the  
‘splendour of an unchallengeable suc-  
‘cess.’—*Ashcroft Noble*. Some latitude  
certainly there is. While all the best  
critics will agree in requiring regularity  
in the two quatrains, there may be dif-  
ference of opinion as to the construction  
of the sestet. There is not the same  
amount of prescription in favour of the  
stricter laws of the sestet, *g, h, i, k*, as  
that which supports the rules, *a, b, c, d*,  
*e*, of the octave.

But neither the practice of the poets,  
nor the dicta of the critics, are suffi-  
ciently uniform or unanimous to afford  
us a ground for the enforcement of the  
rules above laid down. And even sup-  
posing the critics were unanimous, it is  
asked, ‘Shall the inspired poet receive  
‘laws from pedants?’ Poetry is its  
own law, and provided the soul of the  
poet speaks in melodious lines to the

soul of the hearer, the rimes and rhythms may be left free; they will adapt themselves to the occasion. Rules are only fetters which maim and bruise, even when they do not destroy life.

In the most successful pieces of poetical composition the struggle between matter and form is not visible. Expression and thought are adapted, and mutually helpful. But even single lines—Virgil has more of these than any poet, I should suppose—of this perfection are rare. What we usually find is, metrical skill surpassing power of thought, ‘*materiam superabat opus*,’ as in Drummond, and often in Petrarch; or, on the other hand, expression labouring with an idea which it is unable to embody. This conflict, which takes place in that part of poetic effort which falls within the domain of Art,

is most perceptible in the sonnet, for the reason that this is the one form which, in our language, has been brought within the control of fixed rules. It may not be out of place to review, in the case of the sonnet, the basis on which the rules of this form of poem may possibly rest.

Either the rules of the sonnet are arbitrary and established only by usage and precedent, or they are deduced from the reason of the thing. Suppose the rules merely arbitrary. Rules of some sort there must be. Poetry, to begin with, differentiates itself from prose by its words being subject to metrical law. Who made the laws of English metre? Who enacted that the lines of a sonnet must rhyme? Yet no one now would desire to write unrhymed sonnets, though such have been written, and the great name of Spenser may be employed to

countenance the practice. And if antiquity can sanction against fitness, blank sonnets are recognised in the oldest treatise of Poetic which we have, that of Antonio da Tempo, written at Padua in the year 1332. Then as to length. When Lord Brooke wrote a piece of sixty lines of varying length, and entitled it 'A Sonnet,' he was not essaying our species of poem, but only employing a word, which was still foreign, in a capricious manner.

I suppose the most intransigent of our rebels would submit to the limitation to fourteen lines, and would admit that the lines must rime. Yet these two rules are as arbitrary as the rest; they possess the same authority and no more. Where law is arbitrary, the only authority that can bind is the consent of those who live under it. The condition of a game is the consent of all the players to be bound



by the same rules. It is the interest of the players of a game to get a common code which shall be universally recognised. Tennis could not exist if each tennis-player were to claim a right to play his own game according to rules of his own. In order that a game may be played at all, there must be rules, even if they are merely arbitrary rules.

But the laws of the sonnet are not merely conventional laws, they have gradually arisen out of the nature of things—evolved themselves out of the idea of the poem.

To begin with the length. Nothing would seem more arbitrary than the restriction to fourteen lines, neither more nor less. Yet of all the laws of the sonnet, this is the one which has met with most general obedience. Poets who have been unconformable on other points, are careful to count the number

of their lines, and to keep to the mystical fourteen.

If we recur to the idea of the Sonnet, we shall see that the number fourteen was not pitched upon originally by chance—chance afterwards growing into a custom. The sonnet being designed to hold a single thought, mood, image, or sentiment, must have a length sufficient, and not more than sufficient, for an exposition of such sentiment. Length is no more arbitrary in this case than it is in the case of a periodic sentence in prose. A period, said the Greek rhetoricians, must be of length ‘such that can be embraced ‘by the understanding in a single view,’ *ἐνὸς ὁμοῦ*. The limit is given by the average capacity of human apprehension. A period consists of one predication, involving the necessary guards and qualifications. If the side, or secondary, clauses become too numerous, they interfere with

the unity of the sentence ; the attention is withdrawn from the central object, and the impression broken.

The limit of the period is imposed by the average capacity of the logical mind. The limit of the sonnet is imposed by the average duration of an emotional mood. There is the momentary flash and quick surprise of wit in repartee and *bon mot*, of which, as the proverb has it, brevity is the soul. The thrill to be raised by the sonnet is more enduring, yet is too tense to be sustained long. And we cannot let the tension down, and then restore it by another appeal, as is done in the successive strophes of the Ode, inasmuch as the sonnet is to be, by hypothesis, a single, and not a composite, idea. It may be noted by the way that the simplicity of effect in the sonnet may be, and often is, produced by way of contrast ; homogeneity of the

impression here resulting from comparison, which brings about a more satisfying unity than that arising from a single perception.

It would be rationalising in excess to maintain that every mood or motive requires just fourteen lines for its presentment. The Persian poet known to us as Omar Al Khayyam has condensed his thoughts into quatrains. These quatrains are each of them a separate and independent whole, and are not to be taken as verses of a long poem. But a comparison of these quatrains—there is more than one English translation of them—with the sonnet will show that the poetic effects aimed at and reached by the two forms are different in kind. The quatrain of the Persian poet is not a condensed sonnet, nor could a sonnet be made by stretching out the quatrain. Such a comparison will enable us to see that length is not

an accident of the sonnet, but is of its essence. But it is not pretended that the precise number which has been fixed upon, viz., fourteen lines, can be deduced from the reason of the thing. It might have been twelve, or it might have been sixteen, or eighteen, the number which Watson, 1582, 'determined to use in 'every one of his Passions.' May we go so far as to say that fourteen lines is the average number which a thought requires for its adequate embodiment before attention must collapse?

There will always exist recalcitrant criticism. And critics of name may be found in the opposition. Boileau, *e.g.*, repudiates the sonnet precisely on the ground that its length is rigidly defined, and so liable to give too much or too little space for the matter to be contained.

' Pour enfermer son sens dans la borne prescrite,  
' La mesure est toujours trop longue ou trop petite.'

There will always be plausibility in urging that the clothes must be cut to fit the man, and not the man to fit the clothes; that the impromptu of poetic impulse is liable to be extinguished by being forced into pattern moulds.

Giving due weight to such objections, I think the critical jury of the world will sustain the strict legislation of the sonnet, if not on the *a priori* grounds above indicated, at least on those of experience. To the experience of Boileau we may oppose that of Wordsworth,

‘The prison unto which we doom  
‘Ourselves, no prison is; and hence to me  
‘In sundry moods ’twas pastime to be bound  
‘Within the sonnet’s scanty plot of ground.’

Béranger tried to create the impression on his public that if he had more elbow-room he was capable of rising to the sublime. ‘S’il avoit eu cet espace,’ is Sainte Beuve’s just criticism, ‘il eût été

‘ bien embarrassé de la remplir. Il nous  
‘ a fait croire qu’il était gêné dans la  
‘ chanson, quand il n’y était qu’ aidé.’  
Given laws of composition are required  
in favour of the hearer no less than of  
the poet. The lawlessness which young  
poets demand in the name of inspiration,  
if it sets them free, bewilders the hearer,  
who does not know what to expect. The  
critic should remember, if the poet does  
not, that rhythmic effects depend jointly,  
on the sounds uttered, and on the expect-  
ation of the ear. If there are to be no  
recognised rules of sonnet composition,  
the hearer will be defrauded of the satis-  
faction which comes from the recognition  
of a prescribed form. The composer has  
rescued his own spontaneity ; he has for-  
feited the advantage of addressing a disci-  
plined ear. To indite a sonnet, and at  
the same time to refuse obedience to the  
laws of the sonnet, is, as a thoughtful

critic has said, to commit the absurdity of trying to have at the same time the pleasure derived from a sense of prescribed form, and the pleasure derived from a sense of freedom from prescribed form.

The length of the poem once ascertained on whatever grounds, it would soon make itself felt that within these limits there was a necessity for contrast and balance. The difference between a sonnet and a stanza is, that a stanza is a fractional part of a continuous whole. The stanza is one wave of a prolonged melody, and all that the ear requires is that each successive wave should repeat the cadence of that which has preceded it. The sonnet is to be a complete composition in itself, an organic structure, and must therefore be made up of answering parts, like an ode. Indeed, it has



been said that the sonnet is 'the condensation of an ode.'—De Gramont, *Les vers français*, p. 248. 'As every lover of music is sensible of the division, even of the smallest air, into two parts, the second of which is the consequent or necessary demand of the first ; and as these parts consist of phrases and cadences which have similar sequences and demands of their own ; so a sonnet, being a long air or melody, becomes naturally divided into two different strains, each of which is subdivided in like manner ; and as quatrains constitute the one strain and tercettes the other, we are to suppose this kind of musical demand the reason why the limitation to fourteen lines became, not a rule without a reason, but a harmonious necessity.'—Leigh Hunt, *Book of the Sonnet*, i. 13.

Hence flow the two rules above laid

down for the disposition of the rimes; viz., That which requires contrast between the rimes in the quatrains and the rimes in the tercets; and, That which forbids the recurrence in the tercets of the same order of the rimes as is found in the quatrains. See *g.* and *h.* in pp. 13, 14. The observance of these two rules is essential; upon it depends the structural unity of the sonnet, a unity, or organic individuality, which is to be obtained by integration, and equipoise of corresponding parts. For in the sonnet the worth of the whole depends on the arrangement of the parts. The pause in the matter, at the end of the second quatrain, is not a mere suspension of the sense to be resumed in the same strain after rest. It is a turning-point at which the subject is to be gently transferred to a further stage, as in walking we progress in shifting the centre of gravity from one side to the

From *Trabel*, see *MS. 1. 1. 3* about  
all this *Endorse*

other. Now this turn, or volta, in the meaning of the poet, he seeks to protect by the contrast of rime, passing, in the tercets, to a different vowel sound from that which had obtained in the quatrains. The neglect of this articulation is more detrimental to the construction of the sonnet than any other violation of its laws. The ear alone early led writers of verse to reject too often recurring rimes. The monorime was a favourite trick of the early versifiers, who vied with each other, like acrobats, in these feats of legerdemain. Specimens of such may be seen even in Marot, who confesses that he lost himself in them; 'en rimant 'bien souvent je m'enrime.' But good taste gradually conquered, and the proper place of rime, to point and mark to the ear what is being conveyed to the mind, once fully recognised, rime ceased to be produced for its own sake. The repe-

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tition of assonance from having been a virtue came to be regarded as a blemish of verse. The fastidious ear of Malherbe, 1610, could not endure, *e.g.*,

‘ Car l’amour et la loi sont sans comparaison ;  
‘ Amour est un démon de divine nature ; ’

an echo which a generation earlier had not been displeasing to hearers of verse. The two-rimed sonnet became unendurable ; the construction of Spenser’s *Amoretti*, in which the tercet is linked to the second quatrain in a recurrent rime was found to be too heavy, and Milton returned to the early type which had been adopted by Dante in the *Vita Nuova*. But it is to be noticed that though, rhythmically, Milton’s ear dictated to him the necessity for contrasted cadence in the octave and the sestet, he did not equally recognise the principle of shift in the thought.

Of Milton’s twenty-four sonnets all

are regular in the quatrains, A B B A A B B A, and all observe the rule of differentiating the cadences in the tercets from those of the quatrains. When we come to the disposition of the rimes within the tercets Milton admits much variety. Nor is there for this part of the sonnet any regular order fixed by practice or prescription. Perhaps there is none inherent in the conditions of the poem. Or it may be, that the experiment has not yet been sufficiently long continued to ascertain if any one of the possible arrangements has a distinct advantage over others. It may be, that different languages are best fitted with different varieties of arrangement. In Petrarch, *e.g.*, a frequent order of the tercet endings is C D E—D C E. But this sequence is inadmissible in French, on account of the rule in that language which requires the alternation of mascu-

line and feminine rimes. And the terminations of English words afford sounds so different from those of Italian endings, that we cannot recognise the usage of Petrarch or Dante as legislative for us. Each tongue must make its own experiments to the ear.

While we contend for the observance of strict laws of composition, we cannot allow the practice of our earlier writers, however eminent as poets, to be an all-sufficient rule. The deviations from type found in these writers may be partly ascribed to their being that very process of experiment out of which type is to be evolved. We can hardly deny that the example of Shakspeare, and the veneration due to that mighty name, has exercised a misleading influence on our sonnettists. If it had been recognised that the so-called sonnets of Shakspeare are not sonnets at all, any more than those

of Lord Brooke, but a continuous poem, or poems, written in fourteen-line stanzas, as Tennyson's *In Memoriam* is, largely, in sixteen-line stanzas, how much misplaced skill would have been saved !

There being no rules of the sonnet except those which the writers of sonnets agree to impose, and no laws but those which arise out of the nature and conditions of the poem itself, the final type of sonnet can only be ascertained by a succession of experiments. In this way only can we arrive at that particular combination of rimes which best secures the harmony and balance of the composition. Experiments require time, and hence the primitive period of our poetic annals would show the largest amount of oscillation about type, or of deviation from it.

The first English sonnets appeared in

the volume commonly known as *Tottel's Miscellany*. This book, published in London in 1557, bears on its title 'Songes and sonettes written by the ryght honorable lorde Henry Howard late earle of Surrey and other.' Of the pieces intended by the word 'sonettes' there are some sixty, varying in the number of the lines of which they consist from eleven to sixteen ; varying also in the disposition of the rimes, and in the length of the single lines. These sonnets are to be regarded as the first essays of our language awkwardly and painfully essaying to fit itself to the Petrarchan pattern. Surrey, a student both of Latin and Italian verse, could not but be sensitive to the charm of sound which lies in words metrically arranged, and in stanzas harmoniously planned. But the problem of verse is not barely the melodious arrangement of words. Were



this all, the task of the versemaker would be easy. But what he is called upon to find is rhythmical arrangement in combination with syntactical order. He has to marry sound to sense. His propositions must *mean* conformably to the idiom of the language in which he writes, while at the same time his lines must chime so as to extract from that language all the music of which its sounds admit. The history of our versification consists in the struggle after this balance and harmony of sound and sense. In French verse the transition was made, and perfect mastery attained in a single generation. In the school of Ronsard feeling predominated, but the words rather embarrass, than point, the meaning. Malherbe came, and first

‘ D’un mot mis en sa place enseigna le pouvoir.’

The same process required a century in

our more slowly maturing language, and was effected by slow evolution, and not at a single bound.

The advance in this art of combination which was made by Surrey was so great as to lead some of our critics to ascribe to him the invention of a new system of versification. This system Dr. Nott called the 'metrical' as opposed to the 'rhythmical' method of Chaucer and Surrey's other predecessors. Such a generic distinction of system tends to hide from us the fact that both Surrey and his precursors were engaged in working out the same problem. All alike were feeling their way towards that collocation of words by which the most perfect melody could be secured for the ear, without impairing the force with which the meaning was conveyed to the understanding.

It was not the mere imitation of Pe-

trarch which caused Lord Surrey to seize upon the sonnet, but the perception of the fitness of the form as a vehicle for an emotion serious and lofty, but not so ramified as to require the volume of an ode to expatiate in. The justification of the sonnet is the fugitive nature of the poetic mood,—the impossibility for both poet and hearer of sustaining intense emotion, or fixing evanescent impressions for any length of time. The form of verse once transplanted into English, and recognised as a framework, the opportunity which the sonnet affords for distilling strong emotion into drops, was too welcome not to be caught at by all the poets, weak and strong alike. In the fifty years following 1557, the date of *Tottel's Miscellany*, every variation was essayed upon the instrument. And in writing the story of the sonnet, the historian of our poetry must not con-

fine himself to poems of fourteen lines. Such poems as Watson's *Hecatompethia*, though each stave or 'Passion' contains eighteen lines, are as much part of the experimentation as Shakspeare's sonnets, which are all regular in the number of lines, though not in other respects.

Surrey himself, in spite of his fine taste and cultivated ear, could not succeed more than twice or thrice, out of many attempts, in disengaging harmony out of the rude grammar and uncertain accent in which he worked. The compilers of our selections do not venture upon putting forward more than some three or four of Surrey's sonnets, of which one of the best is a mere translation from Petrarch. Sidney, Daniel, Richard Lynch, Constable, Shakspeare's models, have scarce been successful, any of them, as often as Surrey.

The pre-eminent series of poems known

as Shakspeare's sonnets, mock at criticism, and I can but echo the despair of a writer once before quoted, Ashcroft Noble, and say that the rank they hold is such that to ignore them is impossible, and to treat them adequately not less so. Here I have only to speak of them as to form. They only present an occasional approach to perfection of type. First: each sonnet does not stand independently, but relies upon that which goes before, or on that which follows it, to complete the impression. The sonnet is thus robbed of its individuality, and becomes a stanza in a poem. To borrow an illustration from architecture, the sonnet becomes a house in a row, instead of a palace satisfying the eye from whichever side it is viewed.

Secondly: In the struggle of meaning and melody with the unmalleable metal of our language, Shakspeare's sonnets

show us the poet frequently succumbing. In a small number out of the whole 154 does the poet distinctly emerge as master of his instrument, and only in a very few instances does he achieve an uncontested triumph over the obstinate and unpliant material. When he does so, the result is a poem, notable, distinguished, stamped with an individuality which cannot be mistaken. It was an unfortunate choice of vehicle when Shakspeare selected the sonnet form. It was a form in which his superabounding force strangled itself. He is baffled by the language just in proportion to the power of his thought. Shakspeare required freedom, and when free, he spoke English such as no other Englishman ever had skill to utter. But the sonnet's narrow bounds demand condensation. Now the formal requirement of terse expression is a boon to watery or diffuse thinkers. The compression of

fourteen lines effects the expulsion of superfluities, and lends the external support of stays to a weakly frame. Quite opposite is the effect of restricted space upon a teeming fancy and a robust intellect. In him force is concentrated to begin with. In his endeavour after still further compression of energy, he becomes laboured instead of pithy, obscure instead of nervous.

As in the drama Shakspeare ignored the classical unities, so he will know nothing of the established laws of the sonnet. It has been said that he 'disclaimed the smaller economies.' May it not be that he did not know of them? What he knew of, that he followed. As in the substance of his verse he fell in with the reigning fashion of ingenious distortions, so in the form of the sonnet he adopted the metrical arrangement of Daniel, without any suspicion that there

existed a better type. Shakspeare's sonnets, like Daniel's, contain seven rimes. Their analysis is not into an octave and a sestet, but into three verses of four lines each, closed by a couplet. And such has been the fame of the series of Shakspearean poems, that English historians of poetry have to recognise this form, and to create a new species to cover it.

Between the volume of Shakspeare's sonnets, 1609, and Milton's first essays, 1631, the most notable sonnets produced in English are those contained in William Drummond's Poems, 1616. We could not doubt that Drummond's poems had passed through Milton's hands, even if there were not instances of direct adoption of terms of expression. Such are Drummond's 'night attends ;' 'Become all ear' (p. 13), which



seems to be the original of *Comus*, l. 500. Yet it is not possible to speak of any 'influence' of the poet of Hawthornden upon Milton. At the most, Drummond's graceful feebleness, brought into contrast with Shakspeare's excess of strength, may have brought to light the secret that the sonnet demands simplicity; that the feeling intended to be impressed must be immediately conveyed, and not buried away beyond comprehension in a contorted thought uttered in enigmatical language. Drummond is an imitator of Petrarch, and Milton was not the man to imitate an imitator.

Milton's distinction in the history of the sonnet is that, not overawed by the great name of Shakspeare, he emancipated this form of poem from the two vices which depraved the Elizabethan sonnet—from the vice of misplaced wit

in substance, and of misplaced rime in form. He recognised that the sonnet belonged to the poetry of feeling, and not to the poetry of ingenuity. And he saw that the perfection of metrical construction was not reached by tacking together three four-line verses rounded by a couplet at the end. Milton had put his poetical genius to school to the Italians, Dante, Petrarch, and the rest. What of art Milton could adopt from them, he had appropriated. The tradition of the sonnet, coming from what had not ceased to be regarded as the home of learning, appealed to his classical feeling. His exquisite ear for rhythm dictated to him a recurrence to the Italian type in the arrangement of the rimes. We may be sure that Milton's ungrudging submission to the rules of the sonnet was not deference to authority. To that arch-rebel rule and law were as a thread

of tow, if they could not justify themselves to reason. Not so much the Italian tradition, as his own sense of fitness, made Milton recur to the Italian type from which the sonnet had deviated since its first introduction by Surrey.

In recalling the sonnet to the stricter rules of the Italian poet, it should be observed that there are refinements of construction in the Italian sonnet which are often disregarded in the specimens which Milton has left us. The lesser pause at the end of the first quatrain, and the turn over after the octave, are almost always marked by Petrarch. Milton neglects sometimes one, sometimes the other, and not seldom both, of these rests or breaks. It is hard to say whether this neglect is intentional or to be ascribed to imperfect mastery of the form. It has been thought that Milton wished to establish an English

*Not by De la Casa*

species of sonnet, which, while restrained by the laws of the Italian sonnet as to rime, should be wild as Shakspeare's sonnets as to freedom from intellectual subdivisions. Mr. T. Hall-Caine, *Sonnets of Three Centuries*, has lately urged this view. It might be said in its support that Milton has shown in sonnets 3 and 8, that as early as æt. 23 he was not ignorant of the principle of the threefold articulation, which is fairly exemplified in both these sonnets.

Of the first of the two, 'How soon hath 'time,' &c., he speaks himself as 'a 'Petrarchian stanza.' Are we to think that a scholar's eye such as Milton's could have rested long on the page of Petrarch without becoming aware of a constant element of the master's art? In at least six out of the twenty-four sonnets the pause is observed, but it may be doubtful whether this is done by

instinct, or deliberately. In one of the six instances in which the pause is made, it has the appearance of being instinctive rather than a compliance with rule. In sonnet 20, 'When I consider how my 'light is spent,' there is a most effective suspense and turn; but it is placed not after the eighth line, where rule places it, but in the middle of the eighth line:

I fondly ask. | But patience to prevent.

We seem here to have Milton bearing unconscious testimony to the law of pause, and thus recognising its inherent propriety. For it is undeniable that in the great majority of the sonnets the rule is wholly neglected. We seem here in presence of a critical difficulty. Are we to suppose, on the one hand, that in six sonnets out of twenty-four, an artist like Milton stumbled by happy instinct, or unconscious imitation, upon the Italian

arrangement, and yet did not detect the secret?

If, on the other hand, we are to think that Milton knew and despised the pause and the volta, we have to admit an inference equally improbable. This hypothesis is that Milton, who understood that a poem was not entitled to be called a sonnet unless it conformed to the established arrangement of rimes in the quatrains and tercets, and consequently, in spite of Shakspeare, recalled the sonnet to submission to law and order, should yet have been wishing to abet the anarchists in defying law in the intellectual arrangement, which underlies the metrical. The dilemma is perplexing; but I think it on the whole more probable that Milton's attention was not called with equal emphasis to the subdivision of thought as it was to the invariable arrangement of the rimes in the Italian masters.

Of still greater value than this restoration of the true form were the improvements wrought by Milton in the material contents of the sonnet. He at once differentiated it from the ode or the elegy, by confining each sonnet to the utterance of a single independent emotion. Not one of Milton's sonnets is so connected with its neighbour as to require to be read along with it in order to embrace the whole train of thought or feeling. Each sonnet is here a complete poem, freighted with imagery or illustration sufficient to carry home the thought; it is not a fraction of a longer poem, in name a sonnet, in reality a stanza.

Nor are Milton's sonnets merely constructively disconnected from each other. They do not revolve round a common centre, or harp perpetually on one theme. In the *Vita e Morte* of Petrarch, though each sonnet is 'able to stand

singly without implying the rest, yet in each we recur to the same sentiment, and in each find only a variation of the same note. The series of the *Vita* contains 207, that of the *Morte*, 90 sonnets. In each series we know that wherever we may happen to open it, we shall find the poet in the same mood, and rolling the same stone. Seldom is there anything to mark time; in the latest poem as in the first, the same remonstrance, the same despair. The sonnets of Milton are not an exercise upon a given theme. Only in a single instance does the same occurrence furnish the matter for more than one sonnet, sonnets 11, 12. And in this instance—the two divorce sonnets—though the subject is the same in both, the treatment is different; the poet's mood has changed from the frolicsome banter of the first of the two, to contemptuous



indignation in the second. Milton's twenty-four sonnets are spread over a space of twenty-eight years. Each one of the twenty-four arises out of some occurrence in the poet's life, or is the expression of the mood of some distinct period. Though all bear the common stamp of the poet's mind, and are—even the Italian sonnets—pronouncedly Miltonic, yet has each sonnet its own distinct personality and special opportuneness. At his first start, viz., in sonnet 1, a youthful essay, he seems on the brink of yielding to the contemporary taste for conceit ; but he turns aside in time, and he never repeated the error.

The effectiveness of Milton's sonnets is chiefly due to the *real* nature of the character, person, or incident of which each is the delineation. Each person, thing, or fact, is a moment in Milton's life, on which he was stirred ; sometimes

in the soul's depths, sometimes on the surface of feeling, but always truly moved. He found the sonnet enslaved to a single theme, that of unsuccessful love, mostly a simulated passion. He emancipated it, and, as Landor says, 'gave the notes to glory.' And what is here felt powerfully, is expressed directly and simply. The affectation of the Elizabethan sonnet, its elaborate artifice, is discarded, and replaced by a manly straightforwardness. It is a man who is speaking to us, not an artist attitudinising to please us. 'With great lyrists,' says Ruskin, 'their music is always 'secondary, and their substance of saying 'primary.' Some of the subtler harmonies of the sonnet form are sacrificed or disregarded, but what is thus lost is gained in dignity and majesty. We never for a moment feel the suspicion that Milton may be feigning or forcing a

sentiment, as we now and then suspect Petrarch or Shakspeare. The sonnet, the most artificial of our poetic forms, here, for the first time in English, offers its purport with the simplicity of blank verse. Previous English sonnetteers seem to have thought it necessary to match the complexity of the form with an equally elaborate involution of the sense. Their sonnets are works of ingenuity, offering a problem to the intelligence, rather than an excitant to the imagination.

It was said above that no poetry, least of all a sonnet, can afford to be obscure. Where we have to stop to spell out the meaning, the emotional shock to our sensibilities is arrested. Even the inversions compelled by metre, and the constraints of rime in some degree deduct from naturalness, as they do from directness—

‘ Tout arrangement de mesure et de rime  
‘ Ote toujours au cœur ce qu’il donne à l’esprit.’

The verse-writers of the Jacobean period in vying with each other in tying words in knots not to be unloosed, were moving away in a direction exactly the opposite of that in which poetry should walk. The style appropriate to poetry is intermediate between the ingenious conundrums which Donne or Propertius can coin, and the dreary prosing of Drayton. This intermediate style, pregnant but not obscure, suggesting rather than telling, choice but not ornate, has been the ambition of all the best poets in every language. The poet who of all those in our hands has most happily preserved through many thousand verses this 'via media,' is Virgil, always perspicuous, yet whose perspicuity is an arch through which we have the perspective of the untravelled world beyond.

After his first essay, Sonnet 1, Milton threw aside the fashionable model of the

preceding age. In all his twenty-four sonnets there is not a proposition of which the meaning is doubtful, or the construction intricate. He chose deliberately to write thus, when the weight of the precedent of the English sonnet was the other way, and when it was considered to be essential to that form of poem to eschew the direct and the obvious. It is the glory of the Miltonic sonnet that being based upon what is common and simple it attains to the high and noble. We may compare these sonnets with a Florentine palace of the fifteenth century, the work of Brunelleschi, or Leon Battista Alberti, whose stern grandeur, proceeding from simplicity, is more effective than cunning device or elaborate design. Milton applied to poetry what Cicero had proclaimed to be the principle of oratory, viz., that 'whereas all the other arts draw their

'effects from singular and recondite  
 'sources, rhetoric walks in the broad  
 'highway of everyday speech and prac-  
 'tice,' 'ceterarum artium studia fere  
 'a reconditis atque abditis fontibus  
 'hauriuntur, dicendi autem omnis ratio  
 'in medio posita, communi quodam in  
 'usu, atque in hominum more et ser-  
 'mone versatur.'—*De Orat.* i. 3, and  
*cf.* Shadworth Hodgson, *Outcast Essays*,  
 p. 273. It would not be easy to find a  
 sonnet in any language of equal power  
 to vibrate through all the fibres of feel-  
 ing, with sonnet 19, 'Avenge, O Lord,'  
 &c. The new and nobler purpose to  
 which Milton puts the sonnet is here in  
 its splendour : 'In his hand The thing  
 'became a trumpet whence he blew Soul-  
 'animating strains.' Yet with what homely  
 materials is the effect produced ! Not  
 only is there not a single purple patch  
 in the wording, but of thought, or image,

all that there is is a borrowed thought, and one repeatedly borrowed, viz., Tertulian's saying, 'the blood of the martyrs is 'the seed of the Church.' It would not be impossible, but it would be sacrilege, to point to distinct faults in this famous piece; yet we may say that with a familiar quotation for its only thought, and with diction almost below ordinary, its forceful flood of suppressed passion sweeps along the hackneyed biblical phrases of which it is composed, just as a swollen river rolls before it the worn pebbles long ago brought down from the mountain side. From this sonnet we may learn that the poetry of a poem is lodged somewhere else than in its matter, or its thoughts, or its imagery, or its words. Our heart is here taken by storm, but not by any of these things. The poet hath breathed on us, and we

have received his inspiration. In this sonnet is realised Wordsworth's definition of poetry : 'The spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling.'



### METRICAL SCHEME.

OF the twenty-four Sonnets all are regular in the quatrains. The variations in the tercets are shown in the following scheme:—

#### I.

ABBA ABBA CDC DCD

*To this form belong—*

Sonnet 1. O nightingale

„ 8. Captain or colonel

„ 13. A book was writ of late

„ 15. When faith and love

„ 19. Avenge, O Lord

„ 23. Cyriac, this three years

„ 24. Methought I saw

## 2.

ABBA ABBA CDE CDE

*To this form belong—*

Sonnet 9. Lady! that in the prime

„ 10. Daughter to that good Earl

„ 18. Vane, young in years

„ 20. When I consider

„ 22. Cyriack, whose grandsire

## 3.

ABBA ABBA CDE DCE

*To this form belong—*

Sonnet 2. How soon hath time

„ 3. Donna leggiadra

„ 7. Giovane, piano

„ 14. Harry, whose tuneful

## 4.

ABBA ABBA CD CD EE

*To this form belong—*

Sonnet 4. Qual in colle aspro

„ 5. Diodati (e te 'l dirò)

„ 6. Per certo

5.

ABBA ABBA CDD CDC

*To this form belong—*

Sonnet 12. I did but prompt

„ 16. Fairfax, whose name

6.

ABBA ABBA CDC EED

*To this form belongs—*

Sonnet 21. Lawrence, of virtuous father

7.

ABBA ABBA CDD CEE

*To this form belongs—*

Sonnet 17. Cromwell, our chief of men

8.

ABBA ABBA CDE DEC C FFF GG

*To this form belongs—*

Sonnet 13. Because you have thrown off



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*MILTON!* thou should'st be living at this hour!  
England hath need of thee; she is a fen  
Of stagnant waters; altar, sword and pen,  
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,  
Have forfeited their ancient English dower  
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men;  
Oh raise us up, return to us again,  
And give us manners, virtue, freedom, power.  
Thy soul was like a star, and dwelt apart;  
Thou hadst a voice whose sound was like the sea;  
Pure as the naked heavens, majestic, free,  
So didst thou travel on life's common way  
In cheerful godliness; and yet thy heart  
The lowliest duties on herself did lay.

W. WORDSWORTH. 1802.

*He left the upland lawns and serene air  
Wherefrom his soul her noble nurture drew,  
And reared his helm among the unquiet crew  
Battling beneath; the morning radiance rare  
Of his young brow amid the tumult there  
Grew grim with sulphurous dust and sanguine dew;  
Yet through all soilure they who marked him knew  
The signs of his life's dayspring, calm and fair.  
But when peace came, peace fouler far than war,  
And mirth more dissonant than battle's tone,  
He, with a scornful sigh of his clear soul,  
Back to his mountain clomb, now bleak and froze,  
And with the awful Night he dwelt alone,  
In darkness, listening to the thunder's roll.*

ERNEST MYERS.

# **SONNETS.**





*Prefixed to the folio Shakspeare of 1632.*

WHAT needs my Shakspeare for his honoured  
bones

The labour of an age in piled stones ?  
Or that his hallowed relics should be hid  
Under a star-ypointing pyramid ?  
Dear son of memory, great heir of fame,  
What needest thou such weak witness of thy name ?  
Thou in our wonder and astonishment,  
Hast built thyself a livelong monument.  
For whilst to the shame of slow-endeavouring art  
Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart  
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued book  
Those Delphic lines with deep impression took,  
Then thou, our fancy of itself bereaving,  
Dost make us marble with too much conceiving,  
And so sepulchred in such pomp dost lie,  
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.

## ON SHAKSPEARE.

• THESE lines have been sometimes cited as Milton's Sonnet to Shakspeare. But Milton, even before his Italian studies, must have been too well acquainted with the laws of the sonnet, to have designed one in eight couplets. The lines are in fact recommendatory verses, prefixed, according to the fashion of the time, to the Second Folio edition of the Plays in 1632, along with two other copies of verses, both anonymous. Ben Jonson had written the introductory panegyric for the First Folio of 1623, a piece of little point, but containing the famous line, 'He was not of an age, 'but for all time.' Milton's couplets, however, differ from these pieces in not having been written to order, but being the spontaneous outcome of his own admiration for Shakspeare. In the same way Milton's Sonnet 14, though prefixed as commendatory to Lawes' *Choice Psalmes put into Music*, 1648, was written two years earlier and sent to Lawes as an acknowledgment of the delight Milton took in hearing, or playing, his airs.

Milton's sixteen lines reappear in *Shakspeare's Poems*, 1640, and were repeated by Milton himself in his volume of *Poems* 1645, with the date 1630.

The Second Folio Shakspeare contains emendations, evidently conjectural, of the First Folio. Tieck suggested that the printing of this second edition had been superintended by Milton, because the changes in it are poetical, and must have been made by a poet.—Ticknor's *Life*, i. 472, cited in *N. & Q.*, Sept. 1877. And it has been suggested that the lines before the Second Folio, subscribed I. M. S., are also by Milton. The internal evidence of the lines themselves is unfavourable to this conjecture.

Milton's homage here rendered to Shakspeare reads at this day as nothing more than the customary tribute now unquestioningly paid by all. But we must remember that in 1630 such universal recognition as is now accorded to Shakspeare, as the greatest name in our literature, had not established itself. These lines therefore are the original and unprompted utterance of the young poet's admira-

tion and sympathy. Nor is it true, as has been sometimes said, that under the influence of political party, twenty years later, he descended to adopt the narrow Puritan prejudice, and denounced King Charles for his private study of Shakspeare. The passage in Milton's 'Eikonoklastes,' *P. W.*, i. 345, on which this charge is founded, will not bear this interpretation. But it is a fact that after 1630 the growth of the Shakspearean culte was arrested by the spread of Puritan sentiment through the nation. The process of beatification—in our day exaggerated into idol-worship—did not recommence till the early part of the eighteenth century. Even in 1765, Dr. Johnson's Preface to his edition is apologetic in its tone. Scott does not much overdo the sentiment of Puritan England when he makes his republican hero, Colonel Everard, say :—' I cannot think these fine  
' poems are an useful study for the youth of either  
' sex, in which bloodshed is pointed out as the  
' chief occupation of the men, and intrigue as the  
' sole employment of the women.'

1. 10, *needs*.—The Folio Shakspeare has 'neede.'

1. 4, *star-ypointing*.—‘Pointing to the stars;’  
*cf.* Sackville, ‘The Complaint of Henry Duke of  
 ‘Buckingham.’—*Sackville*, West’s ed. 1859, p. 140.  
 ‘Sans earthly guilt ycausing both be slain.’—*Lucy*  
*T. Smith*. ‘Y- prefix answering to Gothic and  
 ‘Anglo-Saxon “ge-,” Meso-goth. “ga-,” which  
 ‘is etymologically equivalent to Lat. “con,”  
 ‘cum. It is usually prefixed to past participles,  
 ‘but also to past tenses, present tenses, adjectives,  
 ‘and adverbs.’—*Skeat*.

1. 10, *beart*.—The Folio Shakspeare has ‘part.’

1. 11, *unvalued* = invaluable. So ‘unex-  
 ‘pressive’ = ‘inexpressible.’—*Od. Nat.* 116.  
*Lycid.*, 176. In Shelley, ‘Over heaps of unvalued  
 ‘stones,’ *Arethusa*, the word bears the sense of  
 valueless.

1. 12, *Those Delphic lines with deep impression*  
*took*.—*cf.* Shakspeare, *Lucrece*—‘The face, that  
 ‘map which deep impression bears Of hard mis-  
 ‘fortune carved in it with tears.’

1. 15.—*cf.* Drummond, p. 58—

' *And though I raise not pillars to thy praise,  
' My offerings take, let this for me suffice,  
' My heart a living pyramid I'll raise,  
' And whilst kings' tombs with laurels flourish green,  
' Thine shall with myrtles and these flowers be seen.'*

1. 15, *And so sepulchred in such pomp dost lie.*—The earliest employment of this conceit preserved to us is in Pericles' funeral oration—  
' οὐ στηλῶν μόνον σημαίνει ἐπιγραφή, ἀλλ'  
' ἀγραφος μνήμη παρ' ἐκδόστῃ τῆς γνώμης  
' μᾶλλον ἢ τοῦ ἔργου.'—*Thuc.* 2. 43; imitated by Pope—' But that the worthy and the good  
' shall say, Striking their pensive bosoms—Here  
' lies Gay.'

1. 16, *That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.*—' No prince would be loth to die that  
' were assured of so fair a tomb to preserve his  
' memory.'—Donne, *Letters*, p. 244, ed. 1651.

I

DATE UNCERTAIN, PERHAPS 1630. ÆT. 22.

O NIGHTINGALE ! that on yon bloomy spray  
 Warblest at eve, when all the woods are still ;  
 Thou with fresh hope the lover's heart dost fill,  
 While the jolly hours lead on propitious May.  
 Thy liquid notes that close the eye of day,  
 First heard before the shallow cuckoo's bill,  
 Portend success in love. O ! if Jove's will  
 Have linked that amorous power to thy soft lay,  
 Now timely sing, ere the rude bird of hate  
 Foretell my hopeless doom in some grove nigh ;  
 As thou from year to year hast sung too late  
 For my relief, yet hadst no reason why ;  
 Whether the Muse or Love call thee his mate,  
 Both them I serve, and of their train am I.

#### SONNET I.

THE heading 'To the nightingale' has been prefixed by the editors; it is not found in either of the two editions superintended by Milton himself, in 1645 and 1673.

In this sonnet and the Shakspeare epitaph Milton has not yet shaken himself free from the trick of contriving 'conceits' as was the fashion of the previous age, and especially of his models, the Italians. After these two juvenile pieces his sense of reality asserted itself, and he never again, in the sonnets, lapses into frigid and far-fetched ingenuities.

1. 1, *O nightingale!*—The baldness of this opening must be felt by every one, but the reason why the effect is bad is not so obvious. Perhaps we may say that the exclamatory particle, falling on the ear first, raises the expectation of a burst of emotion, which is rudely checked when we find it leads to nothing, but only serves as what grammarians call 'the sign of the vocative.' This



check or disappointment will always be felt when the O is prefixed to a substantive standing alone. The blank is less felt, or not at all, where an epithet expressive of strong feeling is joined with the substantive, as in the line 'O misera ed 'orribile visione !'—Petr., *Vita*, son. 193. Here the feeling roused by the exclamation is adequately taken up and carried on by the epithets 'misera' and 'orribile.' Only once, I think, does Petrarch offend against this principle of rhetoric in an opening : 'O cameretta, che gia forte un porto.'—*Vita*, son. 178. His general practice in invocation is to begin at once with the noun, as, *e.g.*, 'Mente mia che presaga de' tuoi danni.'—*Morte*, 46. Wordsworth has followed Milton : 'O night-ingale, thou surely art A creature of a fiery heart,' but it is in a piece which is throughout in Wordsworth's feebler vein. The fatal effect of the initial O upon the verse is outdone by Drummond's 'Ah,' in the line 'Ah handkerchief, last present of my dear !' Milton did not feel this error in his juvenile sonnet, as he sanctioned it by his later judgment, reprinting it in 1673. Since then, Thomson has tried his 'O Sophonisba,

‘Sophonisba O!’ with a result which may serve as a beacon to poets. Milton, in his latest sonnet, 23, was not deterred from ‘But oh!’ by Hall’s satire :

‘Or filch whole pages, at a clap, for need,  
‘From honest Petrarch, clad in English weed;  
‘While big “But oh’s” each stanza can begin.’

—Satires, 6. 1.

The naturalist easily feels that Milton’s nightingale is the poetical nightingale, not the real bird of the English copse and brake, as Milton’s lark in *l’ Allegro* is a lark of his own bookish fancy. This sonnet is only an amplification of the following lines of Chaucer :—

‘But as I lay this other night waking,  
‘I thought how lovers had a tokening,  
‘And among them it was a common tale,  
‘That it were good to hear the nightingale  
‘Much rather than the leved cuckoo sing.’

—*The Cuckoo and the Nightingale.*

The nightingale is as widely diffused in second-hand poetry as he is locally. Indeed more so; Dyer, e.g., *Grongar Hill*, l. 7, placing the bird in the Vale of Towey in Carmarthenshire, whereas

it is a well-known fact in the history of this migratory species of *Sylvia*, that it has never been met with so far to the west. The nightingale 'ros-  
'sinolet salvatge,' is, we are told, Hueffer, *Troubadours*, p. 145, of no less standing allusion in Provençal poetry than he is in English, coming in to the verse as a customary decoration. There is that in the musical note of the bird, and the circumstance of its singing at night, which lays hold of the imagination. The first person who reproduced in words the emotion thus excited was a poet, the rest are mechanical copyists of a pattern. Occasionally only, even in our later day, has it been possible to one or two, 'Jealous of dead  
'leaves in the bay-wreath crown,' to give new expression even to this hackneyed image. See Keats' ode 'To a Nightingale,' p. 237, and Coleridge's *Poems*, p. 167.

1. 1, *bloomy spray*.—Bloom, etym. contracted from A.S. *blosm*, Lat. *flos*; sign. propr. 'flower;' met. said of youth, beauty, wine, fruit, &c., just attaining perfection, untainted by spot or decay. If we were to suppose Milton placing genuine

nature before his mind's eye we should have here to read the word 'bloomy' in a metaphorical sense. The primary sense, 'covered with flowers,' would not be appropriate in an English April. It is of a later season that Gawin Douglas could say, 'The bloomyt hawthorn cled his pykis all.'—*Prol. to Æn.* 12. Milton's 'bloomy spray' is before the bursting of the buds, when the circulation of the sap beneath brings up a purple glow on the surface of the bark, but before the leaf is developed. This is Gawin Douglas' 'The spray 'bysprent with springand sproutis dispers;' and M. Arnold's 'leafless, yet soft as spring The 'tender purple spray on copse and briar.'—*Thyrsis*, p. 211. Pope, but in a young piece, borrowed the phrase from Milton, 'Hear how the birds on 'every bloomy spray.'—*Spring*, l. 23; and after him Campbell, *Pleasures of Hope*, 'bloomy irises.' The epithet is applied by Lady Mary Wortley Montague in its metaphorical sense to two lovers, 'Like thee successful, such their bloomy youth, 'Renowned alike for gallantry and truth.'—*Poems*, 1781, p. 17.

1. 1, *spray*.—I am afraid Milton's nightingale only perches on the *spray* because Chaucer's wood-pigeon 'sings' from it—'The wood-dove upon the spray She sang full loud and clear.'—*Sir Thopas*, st. 10. *Spray* = sprig, A.S. *sprec*; cf. Germ. *spreiten*, *spreizen*; the finer terminal twigs into which the bough or branch spreads itself. cf. Surrey:—

'The soote season that bud and bloom forth brings  
'With green bath clad the bill, and eke the vale,  
'The nightingale with feathers new she sings;  
'The turtle to her mate bath told her tale;  
'Summer is come, for every spray now springs.'

—*Poems*, p. 3.

The degeneration of language through the medium of literature may be exemplified by finding that in the poetical vocabulary of the eighteenth century *spray* may stand for a whole grove or any part of it: 'Ah! I remember well yon beechen *spray*; There 'Addison first tuned his polished lay.'—Mason, *Isis*, 47.

1. 2, *when all the woods are still*; i.e., when the other birds have ceased singing for the day.

Passerat's nightingale, *Œuvres*, p. 171, sings along with the other birds; and Sir Henry Wotton, *Poems*, 1845, p. 14, makes the other 'chanters' of the wood' disregarded when the nightingale begins.

1. 4, *jolly*.—Not a general epithet of 'hours,' but specially said of those hours which herald spring; cf. Petrarch's 'mesi gai,' *son.* 89, *Morte*, i.e., the 'summer months.' In Spenser, *F. Q.*, *canto Of mutabilitie*, 7, the months are distinguished as 'fresh April, fair May, 'jolly June.' 'Jolly' had not in 1631 acquired the association with commonplace and vulgar enjoyment to which it is now restricted. Yet we find the word leaning in this direction in Clarendon's time—'All the licence in sports and 'exercises and company, which was used by men 'of the most *jolly* conversation.'—*Hist. of Rebellion*, 1. p. 396. The usual sense of *jolly* in Chaucer, Spenser, Fairfax, &c., leans towards the signification now fixed to the word in French; 'that which pleases, is agreeable to the eye or 'otherwise;' e.g., 'With *jolly* plumes their

‘crests adorned they have.’—Fairfax, *Tasso*, 1. 35.  
 ‘Full *jolly* knight he seemed and faire did sitt.’  
 —*F. Q.*, 1, 1. In Surrey, p. 10, ‘the jolly woes  
 ‘= the pleasant pains,’ Petrarch’s ‘un piacer,  
 ‘che sol pena m’apporte.’—Son. 195, *Vit.* This  
 is an instance of the disadvantage under which  
 poetry in a living language labours. No know-  
 ledge of the meaning which a word bore in 1631  
 can wholly banish the later and vulgar associa-  
 tions which may have gathered round it since.  
 Apart from direct parody and burlesque, the ten-  
 dency of living speech is gradually to degrade the  
 noble ; so that as time goes on the range of  
 poetical expression grows from generation to gene-  
 ration more and more restricted.

1. 4, *lead on propitious May.*—*cf. Paradise Lost*,  
 4. 264—‘while universal Pan Knit with the  
 ‘graces and the hours in dance Led on th’ eternal  
 ‘spring.’

— *May.*—The nightingale arrives in this coun-  
 try about, or rather before, the middle of April,  
 the male, the song-bird, coming first, and being

followed in ten days by the female. This is the 'summer's front' of Shakspeare, son. 102,— 'As Philomel in summer's front doth sing, And stops her pipe in growth of riper days.'

1. 5, *close the eye of day*.—*cf.* *Comus*, 978— 'where day never shuts his eye.' Crashaw, *To the morning*— 'And the same rosy-fingered hand of thine That shuts night's dying eyes, shall open mine.'—*Todd*.

1. 6.—*first heard before the shallow cuckoo's bill*.—The cuckoo begins to be heard about 17th April.

1. 7, *success in love*.—*cf.* George Gascoigne, transl. of *Ieronimi*— 'I have noted as evil luck in love, after the cuckoo's call, to have happened unto divers unmarried folks, as ever I did unto the married.'

1. 9, *rude bird of hate*.—The cuckoo, *Cuculus canorus*, is feared and hated by all the smaller birds, who pursue it whenever it appears, with



cries of alarm. As deserting its eggs, and leaving the care of its offspring to other foster parents, the cuckoo may be considered a type of selfishness. For this or other reasons, the bird came to be an object of dislike, and its name to be a term of reproach in Greece and Italy,—see Horat. *1 Sat.* 7, 31, and Drayton, *ap. Chalmers*, 4, 415—‘And to the world a byeword now is made, No nation names the cuckoo but in scorn.’ From Italy the superstition passed into the countries north of the Alps. Gibes and puns on the name of ‘the bird of hate’ pervade our sixteenth-century writers. Passerat’s cuckoo hides himself for very shame. ‘Il fuit soymesme S’envole au bois, au bois se tient caché.’—*Poèmes*, p. 206. Gradually the image wore itself out by repetition, and the cuckoo with other poetical rags, with the phoenix, the salamander, and the music of the spheres, was consigned to the dust-bin.

In Mr. Alfred Austin’s sonnet entitled ‘Nightingale and Cuckoo,’ the cuckoo’s note is considered a symbol of gladness, and the song of the nightingale a note of sorrow. By permission of

Mr. A. Austin, the whole sonnet is reprinted as an illustration of Milton's:—

*O nightingale and cuckoo ! it was meet  
That you should come together ; for ye twain  
Are emblems of the rapture and the pain,  
That in the April of our life compete,  
Until we know not which is the more sweet,  
Nor yet have learnt that both of them are vain.  
Yet why, O nightingale, break off thy strain  
While yet the cuckoo doth his call repeat ?  
Not so with me. To sweet woe did I cling  
Long after echoing happiness was dead,  
And so found solace. Now, alas, the sting !  
Cuckoo and nightingale alike have fled ;  
Neither for joy nor sorrow do I sing,  
And autumn silence gathers in their stead.*

DEC. 1631. ÆT. 23.

How soon hath time, the subtle thief of youth,  
Stolen on his wing my three and twentieth year!  
My hasting days fly on with full career,  
But my late spring no bud or blossom sheweth.  
Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth,  
That I to manhood am arrived so near,  
And inward ripeness doth much less appear  
That some more timely happy spirits indueth.  
Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,  
It shall be still in strictest measure even  
To that same lot however mean or high,  
Toward which time leads me and the will of heaven.  
All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
As ever in my great taskmaster's eye.

## SONNET 2.

THE heading of this sonnet 'On his being arrived to the age of 23' is not found in either edition of 1645 or 1673.

The sonnet has every appearance of having been written on Milton's birthday, 9 December. And taking the usual interpretation of line 2, 'Stolen on his wing,' viz. that the 23d year is passed and gone, the date of composition would be 9 Dec. 1631. The verses were sent to a friend, name unknown, with whom he had had a serious conversation the day before, on the subject of taking orders in the Church of England. The friend had urged, as friends do, that it was time Milton was doing something better than 'study.' Milton's reply is a noble vindication of the life of the intelligence, as opposed to that of action. But Milton does not take his stand on this platform, but defends his delay on the utilitarian ground of a desire to make himself 'more fit' for life. He wrote in the letter in which the sonnet was

enclosed: 'Not the endless delight of speculation,  
 'but this very consideration of that great command-  
 'ment, does not press forward as soon as many do,  
 'to undergo, but keeps off with a sacred reverence  
 'and religious advisement how best to undergo;  
 'not taking thought of being late, so it give ad-  
 'vantage to be more fit; for those that were  
 'latest lost nothing, when the master of the vine-  
 'yard came to give each one his hire . . . . Yet  
 'that you may see that I am something suspicious  
 'of myself, and do take notice of a certain be-  
 'latedness in me, I am the bolder to send you  
 'some of my nightward thoughts sometime  
 'since, because they come in not altogether un-  
 'fitly, made up in a Petrarchian stanza, which I  
 'told you of.' Then follows the sonnet, 'How  
 'soon hath Time,' &c.

1. 1, *subtle thief of youth*.—Imitated by Pope,  
*Sat.* 6. 76—'The subtle thief of life, this paltry  
 'time.'

1. 2, *Stolen on his wing*.—Pope, *Im. of Mar-  
 tial*—'While time with still career, Wafts on his  
 'gentle wing his eighteenth year.'

1. 5, *my semblance*.—An allusion to his juvenile face and figure. At Cambridge he is said to have been known as 'the lady of Christ's.' The Onslow portrait, which represented him æt. 21, is now missing, and the engraving of it by Vertue in Newton's *Milton*, 1747, is so poor a performance that it conveys nothing. Milton tells us of himself, *Defensio Secunda*, that when he was forty he was always taken for ten years younger.

1. 10, *It shall be still in strictest measure even*.  
—Nothing in Milton's life is more noteworthy than his deliberate intention to be a great poet, and the preparation he made with that intention from the earliest period. Here we have a solemn record of self-dedication, without specification of the nature of the performance. In 1638, we find, *Mansus*, 80, the determination formed, that his life work shall be a poem, though more than thirty years were to pass over before the execution of the work.

**D**ONNA leggiadra, il cui bel nome onora  
L' erbosa val di Reno, e il nobil varco,  
Bene è colui d' ogni valore scarco,  
Qual tuo spirto gentil non innamora,  
Che dolcemente mostrasi di fuora  
De sui atti soavi giammai parco,  
E i don', che son d' amor saette ed arco,  
Laonde l' alta tua virtù s' infiora.  
Quando tu vaga parli, o lieta canti,  
Che mover possa duro alpestre legno,  
Guardi ciascun a gli occhi ed a gli orecchi  
L' entrata, chi di te si trova indegno ;  
Grazia sola di sú gli vaglia, inanti  
Che 'l disio amoroso al cuor s' invecchi.

## ITALIAN SONNETS.

Rubbish. It is most probable that the six Italian pieces were written during his Italian journey. To attempt verse in a foreign tongue requires courage; but it would be less venturous to do so during residence in the country, while ear and tongue were in daily exercise with accent and idiom. Milton left home in April 1638, and was back in England in August 1639; the greater part of this time had been spent by him in Italy.

Keightley says of Milton's Italian poems, that they have the fault, common and almost inevitable to modern Latin poetry, viz., that of confounding the language and style of different periods; that though written in the middle of the seventeenth century, they present forms peculiar to Dante and the poets of the fourteenth century. Gabriele Rossetti, consulted by Keightley on the point of language, wrote—'Io per me mene uscirei con 'poche parole, dicendo che lo scrivere in lingua 'straniera è stato per Milton un audacia di cui il



‘solo successo potrebbe giustificarlo; ma che  
‘sventuratamente non è così.’

Critical research has not succeeded in obtaining any clue to the name of the lady who is celebrated in these pieces. Warton conjectured that she might be the celebrated singer, Leonora, whom Milton had heard at Rome, and to whom three epigrams, found among his Latin poems, are addressed. The tone of the epigrams does not favour this identification. They express admiration of the artist; while the Italian verses breathe a sentiment inspired by passion. It is a virtuous passion, uttered in the delicate tones, and animated by the high ideal, of Dante and Petrarch, not according to the freer code of the *seicentisti*. It is possible that no individual woman inspired these lines, but that they are the homage of the poet to Bolognese beauty—a new type of beauty to the son of the north, ‘sotto nova idea Pelle-  
‘grina bellezza,’ which carried by storm the susceptible heart of the poet who in sunless Britain would fain have ‘sported with the tangles  
‘of Nessera’s hair.’ It was quite in Milton’s character to personify abstract beauty in his imagina-

tion, and to be stirred by it. He affirms in his *Defensio Secunda* that in all his foreign tour he had never been seduced into illicit indulgence. 'But the pudicity of his behaviour and language 'covers a soul tremulous with emotion,' and ready to take fire even at an ideal composed out of more commonplace attractions than are possessed by the Bolognese women, with their 'stately Junonian 'port, and fire-darting black brow ;' 'Portamenti 'alti onesti, e nelle ciglia Quel sereno fulgor d' 'amabil nero.'

Whether the inspiring divinity were a real individual, or ideal beauty, it was at Bologna that the impression was made. 'L'herbosa val di 'Rhenò' has been mistaken by some commentators for the valley of the Rhine. It is Bologna that is meant, Milton following Dante, *Infern.* 18. 61, who designates the city as, 'tra Saveno e 'il Reno.' 'Erbosa' is not a fitting epithet for the lower part of the course of the Reno, which is now the mere bed of a dry torrent. Commentators have been unable to explain what it is that is called 'il nobil varco.' Can it possibly be an allusion to the ford, or passage, of the Reno, where the com-

pact called the First Triumvirate was concluded between Octavianus, Antonius, and Lepidus ? The Reno must in those days have had water in it, as the precautions taken to secure the safety of the Triumvirs imply.

SONNET 3.

Literal Translation.

*Graceful lady! thou whose fair name honours  
The grassy vale of Reno, and the famous passage,  
Truly is he of all worth devoid,  
Whom thy gentle spirit does not attract ;  
Spirit sweetly displaying itself,  
Of winning deeds never sparing,  
And of those gifts, which are the arrows and bow of love,  
In that region where thy high virtue flowers.  
When thou, lovely, speakest, or, joyous, singest  
So as might draw down the trees of the mountain,  
Then let every man defend of his eyes and ears  
The entrance, and own himself no match for thy worth ;  
May grace from above be his aid  
Ere the ardour of love establish itself in his heart.*

Translated by Langhorne.

*O lady fair, whose honoured name is borne  
By that soft vale where Rhine so loves to stray,  
And sees the tall arch crown his watery way !  
Sure, happy he, though much the Muses' scorn,  
Too dull to die beneath thy beauty's ray,  
Who never felt that spirit's charmed sway,  
Which gentle smiles, and gentle deeds adorn,  
Though in those smiles are all Love's arrows worn,  
Each radiant virtue though those deeds display !  
Sure, happy he who that sweet voice should hear  
Mould the soft speech, or swell the tuneful strain,  
And, conscious that his humble vows were vain,  
Shut fond attention from his closed ear ;  
Who, piteous of himself, should timely part,  
Ere love had beld long empire in his heart !*

Translated by Cowper.

*Fair lady ! whose harmonious name the Rhine,  
Through all his grassy vale, delights to hear,  
Base were indeed the wretch who could forbear*

*To love a spirit elegant as thine,  
That manifests a sweetness all divine,  
Nor knows a thousand winning acts to spare,  
And graces, which Love's bow and arrows are,  
Tempering thy virtues to a softer shine.  
When gracefully thou speakest, or singest gay,  
Such strains as might the senseless forest move,  
Ah then—turn each his eyes and ears away,  
Who feels himself unworthy of thy love !  
Grace can alone preserve him, ere the dart  
Of fond desire yet reach his inmost heart.*

Translated by Strutt.

*O loveliest nymph ! whose name through all the vale  
Where Rhine majestic flows, resounds alone ;  
Blest were the Stoic heart, though careless grown  
To heavenly worth, which thy sweet soul would fail  
To captive ; where all charms at once assail,  
All actions grace, all graces sweetness own :  
That point each shaft from Love's full quiver thrown,  
And deck thy virtues with a fairer veil.*

*O when those lips in speech so matchless move  
Or frame the song that bids the forest bend;  
Be all aware who fear, alas! to love,  
And from the enchantress every sense defend:  
Reason can only save, ere yet desire  
With amorous flame the inmost bosom fire.*

1638-9. ÆT. 31.

**Q**UAL in colle aspro, al imbrunir di sera,  
L' avezza giovinetta pastorella  
Va bagnando l' erbetta strana e bella,  
Che mal si spande a disusata spera,  
Fuor di sua natia alma primavera,  
Così Amor meco insù la lingua snella  
Desta il fior novo di strania favella,  
Mentre io di te, vezzosamente altera,  
Canto, dal mio buon popol non inteso,  
E 'l bel Tamigí cangio col bel Arno.  
Amor lo volse, ed io al l' altrui peso  
Seppi ch' Amor cosa mai volse indarno.  
Deh ! foss' il mio cuor lento e 'l duro seno,  
A chi pianta dal ciel si buon terreno.

#### SONNET 4.

THIS sonnet was perhaps in Pope's mind when he wrote the lines which he interpolated in Thomson's *Seasons* :—

' *Thoughtless of beauty she was beauty's self,*  
' *Recluse among the close (deep) embowering woods.*  
' *As in the hollow breast of Apennine*  
' *Beneath the shelter of encircling hills,*  
' *A myrtle rises far from human eyes,*  
' *And breathes its balmy fragrance o'er the wild.'*

1. 1, *al imbrunir di sera*.—This Italian expression is imitated by Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 4, 246—'where the unpierced shade *Imbrowned* the 'noontide bowers;' cf. *Pens.* 234—'And shadows 'brown that Sylvan loves.' Of frequent occurrence in Petrarch; *Canz.* 4. 3—'Quando vede 'l pastor calare i ruggi . . . E imbrunir le con-trade d' Oriente.' Tasso, *Gerusal.* 5. 76—'il 'ciel s' imbruna.' Zappi, *Son.* 12—'Il gondolier, sebben la notte imbruna.'



1. 14, *A cui pianta dal ciel si buon terreno*.—It has been suggested, *Notes and Queries*, 2 ser. 5. 513, that 'dal ciel' is an error of press or transcription for 'dia 'l ciel,' i.e., 'may heaven give.'

### Literal Translation.

*As on a rugged hillside, at fall of evening,  
The shepherd maiden, with her wonted care,  
Goes watering a foreign and beauteous plant,  
Which expands but ill in the uncongenial clime,  
Far from its own nourishing and native spring;  
So love in me, loosing the tongue,  
Raises the strange blossom of a foreign speech,  
Whilst I, of thee graciously lofty  
Sing, of my own good folk not understood,  
While I change fair Thames for fair Arno.  
Love willed it! and I by others' fate  
Know that Love never willed ought ineffectually.  
Oh! were my sluggish heart and hard bosom  
As good a soil to Him who plants from heaven.*

### Translated by Langhorne.

*As o'er yon wild bill, when the browner light  
Of evening falls, the village maiden bies  
To foster some fair plant with kind supplies,  
Some stranger plant that, yet in tender plight,  
But feebly buds, ere spring has opened quite  
The soft affections of serener skies :  
So I, with such like gentle thought devise  
This stranger tongue to cultivate with care,  
All for the sake of lovely lady fair,  
And tune my lays in language little tried  
By such as wont to Tamis' banks repair,  
Tamis forsook for Arno's flowery side,  
So wrought Love's will that ever ruleth wide!*

### Translated by Cowper.

*As on a bill-top rude when closing day  
Imbrowns the scene, some pastoral maiden fair  
Waters a lovely foreign plant with care,  
Borne from its native genial air away,*

*That scarcely can its tender bud display,  
So on my tongue these accents, new and rare,  
Are flowers exotic, which Love waters there,  
While thus, O sweetly scornful ! I essay  
Tby praise, in verse to British ears unknown,  
And Thames exchange for Arno's fair domain ;  
So Love has willed, and ofttimes Love has shown  
That what he wills, he never wills in vain.  
Oh that this bard and sterile breast might be  
To Him, who plants from heaven, a soil as free !*

Translated by Strutt.

*As on a mountain wild at twilight hour,  
The rural maiden bies, with fostering care  
To tend some plant of lovely hue and rare,  
Which half disclosed, yet droops its tender flower,  
Torn from its kindred gales and native bower ;  
So love in me now rears his blossom fair,—  
This stranger tongue ; while thus with amorous prayer  
To thee, O lady, rich in beauty's dower,*

*Forgetful of my home I tune my strains ;  
And through these fields by murmuring Arno range,  
My Thames neglected, so sweet Love ordains,  
And what Love once bath willed admits no change :  
O, that my sterile heart could likewise own  
Each virtuous plant, the gift of heaven alone.*

## CANZONE.

1638-9. ÆT. 31.

RIDONSI donne e giovani amorosi  
M' accostandosi attorno, e ' Perchè scrivi,  
' Perchè tu scrivi in lingua ignota e strana,  
' Verseggiando d' amor, e come t' osi?  
' Dinne, se la tua speme sia mai vana,  
' E de' pensieri lo miglior t' arrivi ;'  
Così me van burlando, ' Altri rivi,  
' Altri lidi t' aspettan, ed altre onde,  
' Nelle cui verdi sponde  
' Spuntati ad or, ad or alla tua chioma  
' L' immortal guiderdon d' eterne frondi :  
' Perchè alle spalle tue soverchia soma ?'  
Canzon dirotti, e tu per me rispondi,  
' Dice mia donna, e 'l suo dir è il mio cuore,  
' Questa è lingua di cui si vanta amore.'

## CANZONE.

### Literal Translation.

*I am a jest to the ladies and the youths in love,  
As they stand round in a ring ; ' Why write,  
' Why write, in a strange tongue thou knowest not,  
' Versifying of love ? How canst thou dare it ?  
' Say ! so may thy hope not disappoint thee,  
' And of thy thoughts the best come true ?'  
Thus they flout at me. ' Other streams,  
' Other banks await thee, and waters other,  
' On whose green margin  
' Already blooms for thy hair  
' The immortal guerdon of unfading wreaths,  
' Why burdenest thou thy shoulders with this load ?'  
Canzone, I will tell it to thee, thou answer for me,  
My lady saith, and her saying is my heart,  
' This is the tongue in which love glories.'*

### Translated by Langhorne.

*Gay youths and frolic damsels round me throng,  
And smiling say, ' Why, shepherd, wilt thou write  
' Thy lays of love adventurous to recite  
' In unknown numbers and a foreign tongue ?*

*' Shepherd, if Hope hath ever wrought thee wrong,  
 ' Afar from her and Fancy's fairy light  
 ' Retire.'—So they to sport with me delight;  
 And ' Other shores,' they say, ' and other streams  
 ' Thy presence wait; and sweetest flowers that blow,  
 ' Their ripening blooms reserve for thy fair brow,  
 ' When glory soon shall bear her brightest beams: '  
 Thus they, and yet their soothing little seems;  
 If she, for whom I breathe the tender vow,  
 Sing the soft lays, and ask the mutual song,  
 This is thy language, Love, and I to thee belong !*

Translated by Cowper.

*They mock my toil—the nymphs and amorous swains—  
 ' And whence this fond attempt to write,' they cry,  
 ' Love-songs in language that thou little knowest?  
 ' How darest thou risk to sing these foreign strains?  
 ' Say truly,—findest not oft thy purpose crossed,  
 ' And that thy fairest flowers here fade and die?  
 ' Then with pretence of admiration bigh—  
 ' Thee other shores expect, and other tides;  
 ' Rivers, on whose grassy sides  
 ' Her deathless laurel leaf, with which to bind  
 ' Thy flowing locks, already Fame provides;*

*' Why then this burthen, better far declined ?'  
Speak, Muse, for me : The fair one said, who guides  
My willing heart, and all my fancy's flights,  
' This is the language in which Love delights.'*

Translated by Strutt.

*The nymphs and amorous youths around,  
Deride my lyre's unskilful sound.  
' And why,' they ask, ' O why this care,  
' In accents strange to tell thy pains,  
' Breathing soft love in unknown strains ?  
' Confess thy hopes are vain, though fair,  
' That whisper, " sweeter sounds may dwell  
' " In music of a foreign shell."*

*' Cease, cease thy song, another stream,  
' Another shore invites thy theme :  
' Where laurels branch and myrtles blow,  
' To deck with fadeless wreath thy hair :  
' Why then a foreign chaplet wear ?'  
My gentle verse, O smoothly flow,  
And tell the fair for whom I rove,  
' This language is the choice of love.'*



1638-9. ÆT. 31.

**D**IODATI (e te 'l diró con maraviglia)  
Quel ritroso io, ch' amor spreggiar solea,  
E de' suoi lacci spesso mi ridea,  
Già caddi, ov' uom dabben talor s' impiglia.  
Nè trecchie d' oro, nè guancia vermiglia  
M' abbaglian sì, ma sotto nova idea  
Pellegrina bellezza che 'l cuor bea,  
Portamenti alti onesti, e nelle ciglia  
Quel sereno fulgor d' amabil nero,  
Parole adorne di lingua più d' una,  
E 'l cantar che di mezzo l' emispero  
Traviar ben può la faticosa luna ;  
E dagli occhi suoi avventa sì gran fuoco,  
Che l' incerar gli orecchi mi fia poco.

SONNET 5.

Literal Translation.

*Diodati, and I will tell it thee with wonder,  
That wayward I, who used to scorn Love,  
And at his snares have often laughed,  
At last have fallen, where a good man at times is  
entangled.*

*Neither tresses of gold nor vermeil cheek  
It is that dazzle me, but under type new, to me,  
Foreign beauty sheds bliss over my heart,  
Presence lofty, modest, and in the eye-brows  
That calm splendour of a lovely black;  
Words graceful in language more than one,  
And singing, which might from her mid hemisphere  
Well lure the labouring moon.  
And from her eyes darts mighty fire such  
That to stop my ears with wax would do me little good.*

Translated by Langhorne.

*Charles, must I say, what strange it seems to say,  
This rebel heart that Love hath held as nought,  
Or, haply, in his cunning mazes caught,  
Would laugh, and let his captive steal away;*

*This simple heart hath now become his prey,  
Yet hath no golden tress this lesson taught,  
Nor vermeil cheek that shames the rising day:  
Oh! no—'twas beauty's most celestial ray,  
With charms divine of sovereign sweetness fraught!  
The noble mien, the soul-dissolving air,  
The bright arch bending o'er the lucid eye,  
The voice that, breathing melody so rare,  
Might lead the toiled moon from the middle sky!  
Charles, when such mischief armed this foreign fair,  
Small chance had I to hope this simple heart should  
fly.*

Translated by Cowper.

*Charles—and I say it wondering—thou must know  
That I, who once assumed a scornful air,  
And scoffed at Love, am fallen in his snare.  
Full many an upright man has fallen so.  
Yet think me not thus dazzled by the flow  
Of golden locks, or damask cheek; more rare  
The heart-felt beauties of my foreign fair,  
A mien majestic, with dark brows that show*

*The tranquil lustre of a lofty mind;  
Words exquisite of idioms more than one,  
And song, whose fascinating power might bind,  
And from her sphere draw down the labouring moon,  
With such fire-darting eyes that should I fill  
My ears with wax, she would enchant me still.*

Translated by Strutt.

*O Charles, though late this heart with fixed disdain,  
Rejected Love as much beneath its care;  
Yet now before his shrine, with many a prayer,  
Where wisest men have fallen, I own his reign.  
No common charms awoke this fatal pain,  
No vermeil tintured cheek, nor golden hair,  
But Beauty's only Queen, whom, peerless fair!  
These foreign shades conceal: of darkest grain  
Her arched brow bespeaks a lofty soul,  
Persuasive from her lip rich accents flow,  
All elegance, and song whose sweet control  
Down from her sphere the labouring moon might  
bow :  
And though my ears were closed, still would her eyes,  
Darting Love's fire, the captive soul surprise.*

**P**ER certo i bei vostr' occhi, donna mia,  
Esser non può che non sian lo mio sole,  
Sì mi percuoton forte, come ei suole  
Per l' arene di Libia chi s' invia,  
Mentre un caldo vapor, nè senti pria,  
Da quel lato si spinge ove mi duole,  
Che forse amanti nelle lor parole  
Chiaman sospir; io non so che si sia;  
Parte rinchiusa e turbida si cela  
Scossomi il petto, e poi n' uscendo poco,  
Quivi d' attorno o s' agghiaccia, o s' ingiela;  
Ma quanto agli occhi giunge a trovar loco  
Tutte le notti a me suol far piovose,  
Finchè mia alba rivien colma di rose.

SONNET 6.

Literal Translation.

*Of a surety, my lady, thy beauteous eyes  
Cannot but be my sun,  
So powerfully do they smite me, as he is wont  
One who toils along the sand of Libya.  
Whilst a hot vapour, hitherto unfelt,  
Rises from the side where lies my pain,  
Which is what lovers, haply in their tongue  
Call sighing; I know not what it may be;  
Part, pent within me, thick, lurks  
And heaves beneath my breast, or some escaping  
Is frozen in surrounding air, and congealed;  
So much as mounts to the eyes  
Makes each night a night of rain  
Till return of my dawn crowned with roses.*

In part translated by Langhorne.

*In truth I feel my sun in those fair eyes,  
So strongly strike they, like that powerful ray,  
Which falls with all the violence of day  
On Lybia's sands—and oft, as there, arise*

*Hot wasting vapours from the source where lies  
My secret pain; yet, haply, those may say,  
Who talk love's language, these are only sighs,  
That the soft ardours of the soul betray.*

**Translated by Cowper.**

*Lady! it cannot be but that thine eyes  
Must be my sun, such radiance they display,  
And strike me even as Phæbus him, whose way  
Through horrid Libya's sandy desert lies;  
Meantime, on that side steamy vapours rise  
Where most I suffer. Of what kind are they,  
New as to me they are, I cannot say,  
But deem them, in the lovers' language—sighs.  
Some, though with pain, my bosom close conceals,  
Which if in part escaping thence, they tend  
To soften thine, thy coldness soon congeals.  
While others to my tearful eyes ascend,  
Whence my sad nights in showers are ever drowned,  
Till my Aurora come, her brow with roses bound.*

Translated by Strutt.

*Ab lady ! when those eyes such splendour dart,  
They are to me e'en as the sun, whose ray  
Parches the traveller at noon of day  
On Libya's burning waste ; and from my heart,  
Where most their influence strikes, warm vapours part ;  
I know not of what kind, alas ! are they ;  
Yet those who best read Love's soft language say,  
They are but sighs, and prove the bosom's smart.  
Some my afflicted breast would bide,—in vain—  
They feed my anguish, or escaping, baste  
To soften thine, obdurate ; whose disdain  
Congeals their fiery moisture, cold and chaste ;  
While others nightly in my tears o'erflow,  
Till morning comes, with rose-encircled brow.*



1638-9. ÆT. 31.

GIOVANE, piano, e semplicetto amante,  
Poichè fuggir me stesso in dubbio sono,  
Madonna, a voi del mio cuor l' umil dono  
Farò divoto. Io certo a prove tante  
L' ebbi fedele, intrepido, costante,  
Di pensieri leggiadro, accorto, e buono.  
Quando rugge il gran mondo, e scocca il tuono,  
S' arma di se, e d' intero diamante,  
Tanto del forze e d' invidia sicuro,  
Di timori, e speranze al popol use,  
Quanto d' ingegno e d' alto valor vago,  
E di cetra sonora, e delle Muse.  
Sol troverete in tal parte men duro  
Ove Amor mise l' insanabil ago

SONNET 7.

Literal Translation.

*Young, gentle, and simple lover,  
Wishing yet hesitating to fly from myself,  
To you, lady, I offer in deep devotion  
The lowly gift of my heart,—a heart which in many  
a trial  
I have found faithful, intrepid, loyal, discreet, good,  
A source of gracious thought.  
When the great world roars, and thunder bursts  
around,  
With itself this heart arms itself, as with solid  
adamant,  
Secure from violence or from envy,  
From all vulgar fears and hopes,  
Though devoted to genius, to high worth,  
To the sounding lyre, and the muse's service.  
In that part only will you find it less hard,  
Where love has made the wound that never heals.*

Translated by Langhorne.

*An artless youth, who, simple in his love,  
Seemed little hopeful from his heart to fly,  
To thee that heart, O lady, nor deny  
The votive gift, he brings ; since that shall prove  
All change and fear and falsity above,  
Of manners that to gentle deeds comply,  
And courteous will, that never asketh why,  
Yet mild, as is the never wrathful dove,  
Firmness it bath, and fortitude to bear  
The wrecks of nature, or the wrongs of fate,  
From envy far, and low-designing care,  
And hopes and fears that vulgar minds await,  
With the sweet Muse and sounding lyre elate,  
And only weak, when love had entrance there.*

Translated by Cowper.

*Enamoured, artless, young, on foreign ground,  
Uncertain whither from myself to fly,  
To thee, dear lady, with an humble sigh  
Let me devote my heart, which I have found  
By certain proofs, not few, intrepid, sound,  
Good, and addicted to conceptions high :  
When tempests shake the world, and fire the sky,*

*It rests in adamant self-wrapt around,  
As safe from envy, and from outrage rude,  
From hopes and fears that vulgar minds abuse,  
As fond of genius and fixt fortitude,  
Of the resounding lyre, and every muse.  
Weak you will find it in one only part  
Now pierced by Love's ineradicable dart.*

Translated by Strutt.

*An artless youth, to love's soft power a slave,  
Unskilled how best to fly his varied woes,  
Lady, on thee his votive heart bestows ;  
Which heart, refuse not then its peace to save,  
Sufficient trials prove intrepid, brave,  
Calm, virtuous, true, with thoughts that ne'er disclose  
Inelegance, nor yield to dull repose ;  
When shakes the world, and storms tempestuous rave,  
All adamant it rests ; not more secure  
From low desires, that baser souls enchain,  
Than fond of wisdom, genius, virtue pure,  
Of melody, and all the Muses' train.  
In one part only weak, alas ! it feels  
The wound that love inflicts, but never heals.*

NOV. 1642. ÆT. 34.

CAPTAIN, or colonel, or knight in arms,  
Whose chance on these defenceless doors may seize,  
If deed of honour did thee ever please,  
Guard them, and him within protect from harms.  
He can requite thee, for he knows the charms  
That call fame on such gentle acts as these,  
And he can spread thy name o'er lands and seas  
Whatever clime the sun's bright circle warms.  
Lift not thy spear against the Muse's bower ;  
The great Emathian conqueror bid spare  
The house of Pindarus, when temple and tower  
Went to the ground ; and the repeated air  
Of sad Electra's poet had the power  
To save the Athenian walls from ruin bare.

SONNET 8.

*WHEN the assault was intended to the city.* —This heading appears in the Cambridge MS. in Milton's own hand; an older title 'On his dore when the 'city expected an assault' having been crossed out.

The expectation of assault was on 13 November 1642. Edgehill was fought on Sunday, 23 October, and was followed by the advance of the royal army along the Thames valley upon London. Brentford was occupied after a sharp skirmish, 12 November. On the following day the King advanced to Turnham Green. He was there met by the parliamentary forces, 24,000 strong, under Essex, and the two armies 'stood many hours in 'battalia facing one another.' Whitelock, who was present, has left, i. 192, a graphic account of the scene. There was no great alacrity for fighting on the parliamentary side, and Essex's tactics seem to have been feeble. Notwithstanding, the royal army, which was no better generalled, and was short of ammunition, was withdrawn to Colnbrook, and the city was saved from assault.

1. 5, *He can requite thee, &c.*—As in sonnet 1, Milton again adapts into a sonnet a fiction, popular, or of poetical tradition, that a poet's verse can confer fame or immortality. For the Latin poets, *cf.* Propert. 4. 2. 15. Among the moderns may be cited:—Petr. *Morte*, son. 55—  
 'se mie rime alcuna cosa ponno, Consecrata fra i  
 'nobili intelletti, Fia del tuo nome qui memoria  
 'eterna.' Malherbe, *à la reine*, 1610—'et trois  
 'ou quatre seulement Au nombre desquels on me  
 'range Peuvent donner une louange Qui demeure  
 'éternellement.' Ronsard, *Œuvres*, 5. 347—'En  
 'lieu d'un marbre ou un pilier de cuivre, Je  
 'l'éternise et le mets dans les cieux.' Drayton,  
 son. 6—'When I to thee eternity shall give.'  
 Shaksp. son. 81—'When you entombed in men's  
 'eyes shall lie Your monument shall be my gentle  
 'verse, Which eyes not yet created shall o'erread;  
 'And tongues to be your being shall rehearse,  
 'When all the breathers of this world are dead;  
 'You still shall live, such virtue hath my pen,  
 'Where breath most breathes, e'en in the mouths  
 'of men.' *Cf.* Shaksp. son. 55. Milton is  
 copied by Rogers, *Campagna of Florence*—'little

' then Did Galileo think whom he received ;  
 ' That in his hand he held the hand of one Who  
 ' would requite him, who would spread his name  
 ' O'er lands and seas.'

l. 10, *Ematbian* = Macedonian, cf. *P. R.*, 3.  
 290—' Built by Emathian or by Parthian hands.'

— *the great Ematbian conqueror* = Alexander,  
 surnamed the Great, by whom Thebes was sacked,  
 B.C. 333. The legend of the exceptional treat-  
 ment of Pindar's house is widely current among  
 the later Greek and Latin writers. It is told, with  
 variations by Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* 7. 29, Ælian,  
*Var. Hist.* 13. 7, Dio Chrysost., 2. 25, Thomas  
 Magister, *Vit. Pind.* It is likely that Milton's  
 immediate source was some editor's 'Preface' or  
 'Life' prefixed to the text of Pindar, for though  
 the *Vita Pindari* of Thomas Magister is found in  
 various editions of the poet current in Milton's time,  
 in that *Vita* it is the Lacedæmonians and not Alex-  
 ander, who protect the poet's dwelling. On the  
 other hand, it is Thomas Magister who adds the  
 circumstance 'in consequence of a placard posted  
 ' up, on which was written, "Burn not the dwell-



‘ “ing of the poet Pindar,” ’ which was probably in Milton’s mind when he wrote the original title of the sonnet, ‘On his dore when the assault was ‘intended.’ Another version of the Theban story is that the act of clemency was not due to regard for the poet, but was in recognition of the panegyrics he had bestowed on the ancestors of Alexander. The story altogether seems to belong to the cycle of literary fiction which owes its existence to the vanity of authors magnifying their own pursuits.

1. 13, *sad*.—The epithet belongs to Electra, not to the poet.

— *sad Electra’s poet*, i.e., Euripides, whose tragedy *Electra*, produced during the Sicilian expedition, B.C. 415-413, is one of the nineteen plays remaining to us. The books in which his daughter Deborah represented Milton as most delighting after Homer—which he could almost repeat—were Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Euripides. The copy of Euripides Milton used—the edition is that of Paulus Stephanus, 1602—was extant in Mr. Joddrell’s time, 1789, and is pro-

bably still in existence. A few marginal notes, chiefly corrections of the text, show nothing memorable except the scholarly care with which Milton read Greek.

1. 14, *To save the Athenian walls from ruin bare.*—On the taking of Athens by the Lacedæmonians, B.C. 404, the leaders of the combined Greek forces deliberated as to how the city should be dealt with. The Thebans proposed to raze it to the ground, and to turn the site into a sheep-walk. While the decision was in suspense, on one occasion the generals were at wine together, and it so happened, a Phocian sang part of a chorus of the *Electra* which begins with the line,

Ἄγαμέμνωνος ὦ πόρτα ἤλυθον κ.τ.λ.

Eur. *El.* 167.

Those present were so affected that they agreed it would be an unworthy act to destroy a city which had produced such noble poets. This is Plutarch's story, which bears the stamp of literary coinage upon its face. If such a proposal was made by the Thebans, a divine Ate swiftly over-

took them, for within seventy years their own city was taken by Alexander, 6000 of the inhabitants put to the sword and 30,000 sold as slaves.  
—Ælian. *Var. Hist.* 13. 7.

This is one of the two sonnets which Johnsonian criticism excepts from its general condemnation.  
‘ The sonnets deserve not any particular criticism ;  
‘ for of the best it can only be said that they are  
‘ not bad ; and perhaps only the 8th and 21st  
‘ are truly entitled to this slender commendation.’



*To a Lady.*

LADY! that in the prime of earliest youth  
Wisely hast shunned the broad way and the green,  
And with those few art eminently seen,  
That labour up the hill of heavenly truth,  
The better part with Mary and with Ruth  
Chosen thou hast, and they that overween,  
And at thy growing virtues fret their spleen,  
No anger find in thee but pity and ruth.  
Thy care is fixed, and zealously attends  
To fill thy odorous lamp with deeds of light,  
And hope that reaps not shame; Therefore be sure,  
Thou, when the Bridegroom with his feastful friends  
Passes to bliss at the mid hour of night,  
Hast gained thy entrance, virgin wise and pure.

### SONNET 9.

IT is not known who the lady was to whom this sonnet is addressed. Phillips mentions a Miss Davis as a young person whom Milton had thought of espousing when his wife deserted him, and it has been suggested that the virtues celebrated in these lines were those which Milton would have sought for in a wife. But there is no evidence to show that Miss Davis is the person addressed.

The sonnet exemplifies what was said above of Milton's sonnets generally, and the theory of poetry there hinted at. Imagery here is the hackneyed biblical allusion; the thought commonplace; the language ordinary; yet it will hardly be denied that the effect is impressive. This result is not merely an illusion produced by the prestige of the writer; it is due to the sense that here is a true utterance of a great soul.

The reader will note the different attitude assumed in this, and the next, sonnet towards woman, to that which the court poet of the

earlier period of sonnet-writing adopts. Take as a specimen the most chivalrous of the class, Surrey:—

*The golden gift that Nature did thee give,  
To fasten friends and feed them at thy will,  
With form and favour, taught me to believe  
How thou art made to show her greatest skill;  
Whose hidden virtues are not so unknown,  
But lively dames might gather at the first  
Where beauty so her perfect seed hath sown,  
Of all other graces follow needs there must.  
Now, certes Lady, since all this is true,  
That from above thy gifts are thus elect,  
Do not deface them then with fancies new.  
No change of minds let not the mind infect:  
But mercy him thy friend, that doth thee serve,  
Who seeks always thine honour to preserve.*

1. 2, *the broad way* is from S. Matth. 7. 13, *ὁ εὐρύς ὁδός*.

— *and the green*.—Why should the wrong road be green? Elsewhere Milton himself delights in walking ‘On the dry smooth-shaven green,’ *Pens.*

66, or 'By hedge-row elms on hillocks green,'  
*L'All.* 58. Is it that the path of pleasure is *green*  
 —cf. Shelley, sonnet, p. 302, 'press With such  
 'swift feet life's green and pleasant path'—while  
 the way of duty is a dusty, barren highway?

1. 5, *Ruth.*—It may be taken as evidence of  
 gradual refinement of the English ear that such a  
 rime as Milton here allows himself would not  
 now be tolerated. In the earlier days of our  
 versification such repetition was not perceived as  
 a blemish, even within the narrow limits of a  
 sonnet; e.g., Drayton, son. 17—'In whom  
 'heaven looks itself as in a *glass*; Time look  
 'thou too in this tralucent *glasse*.' Shakspeare,  
 son. 46, commits this fault twice, riming  
 'heart—heart,' 'part—part.' Dante seemed to  
 have authorised the practice, e.g., *Vit. Nuov.* 9—  
 'parte—parte.'

1. 6, *overween.*—He is fond of this word. See  
*P. L.*, 10. 878; *P. R.*, 1. 147; *P. W.*, ed. 1698,  
 1. 141, 2. 115.—*Todd.*



l. 7, *fret their spleen*.—Dante's lady, *Vit. Nuov.* 27—'E sua beltate è di tanta virtute Che nulla 'invidia all' altre ne procede.' Mrs. Hutchinson's own expression was what Milton has here ascribed to his lady.—See *Mem. of Col. Hutchinson*, ed. 1806, p. 44.

l. 11, *hope that reaps not shame*, ἐλπίς οὐ καταισχύνει.—*Rom.* 5. 5.

l. 12, *feastful*.—*Sams. Ag.*, 1741—'On feastful days.' Parker, *Transl. of Psalms* — 'our solempne feastful day.'—*Todd*.



1644-5. *ÆT.* 36-7.*To the Lady Margaret Ley.*

DAUGHTER to that good earl, once president  
 Of England's council and her treasury,  
 Who lived in both unstained with gold or fee,  
 And left them both, more in himself content,  
 Till the sad breaking of that parliament  
 Broke him, as that dishonest victory  
 At Chæroneæ, fatal to liberty,  
 Killed with report that old man eloquent.  
 Though later born than to have known the days,  
 Wherein your father flourished, yet by you,  
 Madam, methinks I see him living yet ;  
 So well your words his noble virtues praise,  
 That all both judge you to relate them true,  
 And to possess them, honoured Margaret.

SONNET 10.

THE heading 'To the Lady Margaret Ley' is not in Milton's own editions of 1645 and 1673.

Phillips relates that during the time Milton was deserted by his wife, he, 'now as it were a single man again, made it his chief diversion now and then of an evening to visit the Lady Margaret Ley. This lady being a woman of great wit and ingenuity had a particular honour for him, and took much delight in his company, as likewise Captain Hobson, her husband, a very accomplished gentleman.'—*Life*, p. 367.

1. 1, *that good earl*.—James Ley, born 1552, Lord High Treasurer 1622, and afterwards, 1628, Lord President of the Council. In the same year, 1628, he was advanced to the earldom as Earl of Marlborough. He died in 1629, and his family seem to have believed that his death, æt. 77, was hastened by disappointment at the line of policy adopted by the court, and the sudden breaking up, 10 March, of the new Parliament.

1. 4, *left them both*—not meaning that he voluntarily resigned, but that when dismissed, he went willingly. Clarendon says, ‘the Earl of Marlborough was removed under pretence of his age and disability for the work, which had been a better reason against his promotion so few years before, that his infirmities were very little increased.’—*Hist. of Reb.*, I. p. 48.

1. 6, *dishonest*.—In the English of our day a ‘dishonest victory’ would mean ‘a victory dishonestly gained.’ Milton uses the word in the sense of the Latin ‘inhonestus.’ But it is not evident whether it should be understood of the defeated, to whom it brought ‘ruin, confusion, and ignominy;’ or of the victor, to whom it was inglorious to have crushed the champion of the liberties of Greece.

1. 7, *Cheronea*, B.C. 338, when the joint forces of Thebes and Athens were defeated and destroyed by Philip of Macedon.

1. 9, *Killed with report that old man eloquent*.

—Isocrates, who, æt. 99, died four days after the news of the disaster of Chæroneæ reached Athens, see *Dionys. Vit. Oratt.*, as Ley's death followed exactly four days after the dissolution of Parliament on 10 March 1629.

1645-6. æt. 38.

*On the detraction which followed upon my writing  
certain treatises.*

A BOOK was writ of late called 'Tetrachordon,'  
And woven close, both matter, form, and style;  
The subject new; it walked the town a while,  
Numbering good intellects; now seldom pored on.  
Cries the stall-reader, 'Bless us! what a word on  
'A title-page is this!' And some in file  
Stand spelling false, while one might walk to Mile-  
End Green. Why is it harder, sirs, than Gordon,  
Colkitto, or Macdonnel, or Galasp?  
Those rugged names to our like mouths grow sleek,  
That would have made Quintilian stare and gasp.  
Thy age like ours, O soul of Sir John Cheek,  
Hated not learning worse than toad or asp,  
When thou taughtest Cambridge and King Edward  
Greek.

## SONNET 11.

SONNETS 11, 12, first appeared in Milton's second edition of 1673. Possibly they were written after the edition of 1645 was sent to press.

In 1643 Milton brought out a pamphlet entitled 'The doctrine and discipline of divorce restored 'to the good of both sexes.' The Presbyterians, and the Puritans generally, were scandalised by the liberal notions there propounded, and a vehement outcry was raised against the book. Milton, who was not of a disposition to be silenced or daunted by clamour, returned again and again to the argument of his first pamphlet, and reinforced it by supplementary tracts, of which he issued three:—1. The judgment of Martin Bucer concerning divorce. 2. Tetrachordon: Expositions upon the four chief places of Scripture which treat of marriage. 3. Colasterion. The two last were published together on 4 March 1645. The two sonnets 11 and 12 must have been written after that date, some time in the latter half of 1645.



1. 1, *Tetrachordon*.—A Greek word meaning ‘the four-stringed ;’ a term implying the four texts of Scripture expounded in the book.

1. 2, *And woven close both matter, form, and style*—applicable to all Milton’s prose, and as good a description of it as can be given.

1. 3, *the town*.—I have not ascertained the earliest date at which London began to be spoken of as ‘town,’ but it is so in 1587, ‘one newly ‘come to town.’—Matthew Grove, *History of Pelops*.

1. 4, *Numbering good intellects* = as forming a crucial test of the reader’s capacity, requiring close attention to follow the argument; *cf.* what Bernays says of Aristotle’s *Poëtics* that the book ‘seit vier Jahrhunderten ein Kreuz und ein ‘Werthmesser der Kritiker gewesen ist.’—*Dial. d. Arist.*, p. 9. Milton himself had written in his ‘Address’ prefixed to the first divorce tract, the *Doctrine and Discipline, &c.*—‘I seek not to seduce ‘the simple and illiterate ; my errand is to find

‘out the choicest and the learnedest, who has this  
‘high gift of wisdom to answer solidly, or to be  
‘convinced.’

1. 4, *pored on*.—G. Wither, *Obsequies on Prince Henry*, 1613—

‘*Was himself a book for kings to pore on*

‘*And might have been a Basilicon Doron.*’

—Todd.

1. 5, *the stall-reader*.—A personage not yet extinct on the quays of Paris.

1. 8, *Gordon, Colkitto, Macdonnel, or Galasp?*  
—‘Leaders under Montrose in his campaign of  
‘1644-5. George, Lord Gordon, the eldest son  
‘of the Marquis of Huntly; the other three names  
‘belong to the same person, Alexander Macdonald  
‘the younger, commonly called young Colkitto.’  
—Masson.

1. 10, *grow sleek*, from being so often uttered during the alarm occasioned to the Parliament in London by Montrose’s rapid success in Scotland.

l. 11, *Quintilian*.—An ear such as that of Milton tuned to the full and rounded sound of the Italian vowels, was keenly sensitive of the harshness of a language in which the vowel sounds are slurred, and the consonants, gutturals especially, come into prominence.

l. 12, *Like ours, i.e., 'as ours hates.'*

— *Sir John Cheke* had been Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge, and was afterwards preceptor to Edward VI. The introduction of his name into this sonnet may be justified on the ground that he is here taken as a representative of Greek learning. But it is natural to ask why Cheke in particular was selected for this distinction? Mr. Masson, whose thoroughgoing research has discovered so much else illustrative of Milton, has found the key to this in the fact that Cheke had been a member of a commission appointed by Parliament to codify ecclesiastical law. The draft of this code included a law of divorce, which enlarged the permission much beyond the limits assigned by the canon law of the Catholic Church. Thus it was only by chance that a law of divorce

such as Milton was advocating was not actually in force in England. An account of this commission is given by Milton at the end of his tract called *Tetrachordon*.

1. 13, *Hated not learning*.—Some of the early nonconformists in the time of Elizabeth and James, being themselves men of education, had been aware of the value of learning and scholarship. Their exclusion from the universities, and the growth of enthusiasm, gradually produced a temper antagonistic to all knowledge. Milton does not spare his party on this point, to which he frequently recurs in his pamphlets. Writing of Cambridge as he knew it in 1628, he says, ‘Most of our  
‘ students, strangers alike to philology and philo-  
‘ sophy, fly off all unfledged to theology; it is to  
‘ be feared that the ignorance of the old age, *i.e.*,  
‘ the times before the Reformation, is about to set  
‘ in, and take possession of our clergy.’—*P. W.*,  
5. 372.

1645-6. ÆT. 38.

*On the same.*

I DID but prompt the age to quit their clogs  
By the known rules of ancient liberty,  
When straight a barbarous noise environs me  
Of owls and cuckoos, asses, apes, and dogs :  
As when those hinds that were transformed to frogs  
Railed at Latona's twin-born progeny,  
Which after held the sun and moon in fee.  
But this is got by casting pearl to hogs ;  
That bawl for freedom in their senseless mood,  
And still revolt when truth would set them free.  
Licence they mean when they cry liberty ;  
For who loves that, must first be wise and good ;  
But from that mark how far they rove we see,  
For all this waste of wealth, and loss of blood.

SONNET 12.

**T**HIS sonnet was written at the same time and on the same occasion as the preceding.

1. 1, *clogs*.—Clog = a log of wood hung upon an animal to hinder motion. So Shaksp., *Oth.*  
1. 3. 198—‘thy escape would teach me tyranny,  
‘To hang clogs on them.’

1. 2, *the known rules of ancient liberty; i.e.*, before divorce was restrained by the canon law. Milton writes in his pamphlet on divorce, ‘An  
‘older law than any written law is to force  
‘nothing against the faultless proprieties of  
‘nature.’

1. 3, *barbarous noise environs me*.—Milton’s contempt for the verdict of the vulgar is an angry, not a philosophic, contempt. His prose tracts are pitched in the same key; *cf. Judg. of Bucer*—  
‘a-perverse age, eager in the reformation of  
‘names and ceremonies, but in realities as ignorant as their forefathers.’

1. 4, *Of owls and cuckoos, asses, apes, and dogs.*  
—‘There is a portrait of the Spanish poet, Lope  
‘de Vega, painted when he was young, sur-  
‘rounded by dogs, monkeys, and other monsters.  
‘It is not improbable that Milton might have  
‘seen, or heard of, this picture.’—*Todd.*

1. 5, *transformed to frogs*, as told by Ovid,  
*Met.* 6. 369.

1. 7, *beld in fee*.—‘The general sense of the  
‘word “feodum” is “land holden of another by  
‘“service.” But as such estates were originally  
‘termed “beneficia,” and did not acquire the  
‘name of “feoda” till they were descendible;  
‘and as all the lands in England are supposed to  
‘be holden, mediately or immediately, of the  
‘king; for these concurrent reasons, the word  
‘fee very early obtained with us a peculiar mean-  
‘ing, and signified the same merely as inherit-  
‘ance. An estate therefore in fee simple is an  
‘unqualified inheritance in lands unlimited in its  
‘duration as to descent.’—Wooddeson, *View of the  
Laws of England*, 2. 7.

Wordsworth has borrowed Milton's metaphor  
—'Once did she hold the gorgeous East in fee.'

*Works*, 3. 62.

1. 9, *That bawl for freedom in their senseless mood.*—'What though the brood of Belial, the  
'druff of men, to whom no liberty is pleasing,  
'but unbridled and vagabond lust without pale or  
'partition, will laugh broad perhaps . . . they  
'will know better when they shall hence learn  
'that honest liberty is the greatest foe to dis-  
'honest licence.'—*Doct. and Disc.*, *P. W.*, 2. 6.

'*And what the people but a herd confused,*

'*A miscellaneous rabble who extol*

'*Things vulgar.*' —*P. R.*, 3. 49.

1. 11, *Licence they mean when they cry liberty.*  
—'The exposition here alleged is neither new  
'nor licentious, as some now would persuade the  
'commonalty, although it be nearer truth that  
'nothing is more new than those teachers them-  
'selves, and nothing more licentious than some  
'known to be, whose hypocrisy yet shames not  
'to take offence at this doctrine for licence,



‘whereas indeed they fear it would remove  
‘licence and leave them few companions.’—*Tetra-*  
*chordon*, *P. W.*, 2. 273. Cf. Hartley Coleridge—  
‘For what is freedom, rightly understood, A  
‘universal licence to be good.’—*Poems*, 1. 149.  
J. C. Scaliger, *Epidorp.*, 1. p. 101, ‘Tu, nolo,  
‘putes libera, quæ licentiæ sunt; Parere deo et  
‘legibus, esse liberum hoc est.’

1. 12, *Who loves that must first be wise and*  
*good.*—‘None can love freedom heartily but good  
‘men; the rest love not freedom but licence,  
‘which never hath more scope or indulgence  
‘than under tyrants.—*Tenure of Kings*, *P. W.*, 2.  
450.



1646? æt. 38.

*On the new forcers of conscience,  
under the long parliament.*

BECAUSE you have thrown off your prelate lord,  
And with stiff vows renounced his liturgy,  
To seize the widowed whore Plurality  
From them whose sin ye envied, not abhorred ;  
Dare ye for this adjure the civil sword  
To force our consciences that Christ set free,  
And ride us with a classic hierarchy  
Taught ye by mere A. S. and Rutherford ?  
Men, whose life, learning, faith, and pure intent,  
Would have been held in high esteem with Paul,  
Must now be named and printed heretics  
By shallow Edwards and Scotch what d'ye call :

But we do hope to find out all your tricks,  
Your plots and packing, worse than those of Trent ;  
                                    That so the parliament  
May, with their wholesome and preventive shears,  
Clip your phylacteries, though balk your ears,  
                                    And succour our just fears,  
When they shall read this clearly in your charge,  
New Presbyter is but old Priest writ large:

### SONNET 13.

**I**N the two last lines of the preceding sonnet we see Milton distinctly breaking with the Presbyterians; in the present sonnet he declares for the principle of Independency, viz., liberty of conscience. Milton was among the first to find out that intellectual liberty was no more to be allowed by the rigid Presbyterianism of the Westminster Assembly than it had been by Laud and the bishops.

In point of form this sonnet has been sometimes treated as though it were a monstrous and misshapen birth, and not a sonnet at all. Todd, ed. 1809, does not place it among the sonnets. Masson, ed. 1874, though placing it after Sonnet 12, does not number it; 13 in his numeration being the number of the following sonnet, 'Harry, whose tuneful,' &c. 'The forcers of conscience,' however, is as regular a sonnet, and as strictly conformed to the Italian model, as any of the other twenty-three. It is of the form called 'colla coda,' a form which seems to have been introduced as early as the fifteenth century, and was much used by a Rabelaisian Florentine

satirist who went by the name of Burchiello. From him was derived the denomination Burchielleschi, applied to a species of homely and familiar verse. This form went out of fashion during the sixteenth century, but was revived at the beginning of the seventeenth, and Milton may have met with sonnets of this burlesque form in circulation at Florence. At any rate, in this sonnet alone we have sufficient evidence that Milton went to Italian models for his sonnets.

The rules for the construction of the 'coda' are as precise as those for the body of the sonnet itself. The 'coda' may consist of one or any greater number of tercets. The first line of each tercet must be shorter than, but bear a definite proportion to, the length of the lines in the body of the sonnet; *e.g.*, if the sonnet is in decasyllable lines, the first line of the tercet must be a six-syllable line. The first dwarf line must rime with the fourteenth line of the sonnet itself, but the rime in the remaining two lines of the tercet must be different from any which have been employed in the sonnet. The sonnet may be prolonged by any number of tercets constructed

upon this principle. The 'coda' in Milton's tailed sonnet conforms strictly to these rules.

1. 1, *thrown off your prelate lord*.—If we are to construe these words strictly as referring to the legal abolition of Episcopacy, it would compel us to date this sonnet after 9 October 1646, when the ordinance for abolishing Archbishops and Bishops passed the Commons.

1. 2, *renounced his liturgy*.—The Directory was ordered to be used in all churches, instead of the Prayer Book, 3 January 1645.

1. 3, *plurality*.—The parochial endowments were not confiscated, and as many of the Royalist clergy left their livings rather than conform to the Presbyterian government and ritual, there was much preferment vacant, and consequently much scramble for it. This was offensive in the eyes of the ultra Puritans. Milton had already come to regard as unholy not endowments only, but all payment for religious ministrations.

1. 7, *classic hierarchy*.—'Class' or 'classic' = Presbytery, or council of the combined ministers

and elders of all the congregations in a given district. The mocking tone of the sonnet is aided by our recalling the ordinary and better sense of the epithet 'classic.'

l. 8, *mere A. S.*—Adam Stewart, a vigorous pamphleteer on the side of orthodox Presbyterianism against the new sectaries. He is designated by his initials partly to sustain the colloquial familiar tone of the piece, but also perhaps because Stewart so signed his own pamphlets. Samuel Rutherford was Professor of Divinity in the University of S. Andrews, and one of the four Scotch ministers who sat in the Westminster Assembly. If Milton has in view Rutherford's disputation on liberty of conscience, the date of this sonnet must be placed three years later, *i.e.*, 1649.

l. 12, *shallow Edwards*.—*Shallow* is a favourite epithet of contempt in Milton's pamphlets, *e.g.*, 'shallow commenting of scholastics and canonists.'—*Doct. and Disc.*, *P. W.*, 2. 10. Its signification as applied to Edwards may be gathered from its



use by Milton of the cuckoo in Sonnet 1. Edwards was one of the cuckoos by whose 'barbarous 'noise' he was 'enviored.' The *Gangræna* of that prolific pamphleteer came out in the year 1646, which I have supposed to be the date of this sonnet. Milton is named in this pamphlet, and classed by Edwards among the heretics.

1. 12, *Scotch what-d'ye-call*. — The four Scottish divines who attended the Westminster Assembly as commissioners from the Kirk were, Alexander Henderson, George Gillespie, Robert Baillie, and Samuel Rutherford. As Rutherford has been already mentioned, 'Scotch what-d'ye-call' may be any of the other three. If we suppose Henderson intended, then this sonnet must have been written before August 1646, in which month Henderson died. If Gillespie were intended, the 'what-d'ye-call' might convey a sneer at the outlandish Scotch name irreducible to metre. Masson thinks that it is most probable that it is Baillie who is meant. In Robert Baillie's *Dissuasive*, published in 1645, Milton is stigmatised for his opinions on divorce much in

the same way as in Edwards' *Gangrena*. The 'what-d'ye-call,' like the initials 'A. S.,' carry on the mocking and contemptuous tone of the satire.

1. 14, *packing, worse than those of Trent*—meaning, that as the Council of Trent was packed so as to exclude the Protestants, the Westminster Assembly was constituted so as to exclude all other shades of opinion except the Presbyterian.

1. 17, *clip your phylacteries*.—Phylactery, lit. = amulet; met. = sanctimonious and pharisaical pretensions to superior religiosity.

— *balk your ears, i.e.*, the Parliament will not, as the Star Chamber did, cut off ears, but it will check your pretensions and restrain your powers.

1. 19, *When they shall read this clearly in your charge*.—This is obscure; perhaps it means 'when they shall read in the charges which the party of toleration are bringing against you.'

1. 20, *Writ large*.—For *priest* is only an English contraction of the Greek 'Presbyteros.'

1646. æt. 38.

*To Mr. H. Lawes, on his airs.*

**H**ARRY, whose tuneful and well-measured song  
 First taught our English music how to span  
 Words with just note and accent, not to scan  
 With Midas' ears, committing short and long,  
 Thy worth and skill exempts thee from the throng,  
 With praise enough for envy to look wan;  
 To after age thou shalt be writ the man,  
 That with smooth air couldst humour best our tongue.  
 Thou honourest verse, and verse must send her wing  
 To honour thee, the priest of Phœbus' quire,  
 That tunest their happiest lines in hymn or story.  
 Dante shall give fame leave to set thee higher  
 Than his Casella, whom he wooed to sing,  
 Met in the milder shades of purgatory.

#### SONNET 14.

THIS sonnet appeared in print as prefixed to '*Choice Psalmes . . .* by Henry and William Lawes, brothers, 1648.' Henry Lawes of the Chapel Royal was the favourite and fashionable composer of the time. Eight years older than Milton, he had been his friend from boyhood. It was Lawes who had superintended the representation of *Comus* at Ludlow, who had set the songs to music, and who had afterwards in 1637 sent the piece to press. Lawes was described in Milton's volume of 1645 as 'Gentleman of the king's chapel, and one of His Majesty's private music.' His *Choice Psalmes*, 1648, are dedicated to the captive king. It was this royalist and cavalier volume to which Milton supplied the commendatory sonnet. Violent partisan as Milton was, he did not allow political feeling to sever the tie of early friendship, or of a common love of musical art. Milton's delight in music, his taste and skill, are well known. Even if it had not been expressly put on record by those who knew him, this passion for music could have been inferred from the poems.

1. 4, *Midas' ears*—*cf.* Nash, *Pierce Pennilesse*,  
'Without redress complains my careless verse,  
'And Midas' ears relent not at my moan.'—  
*Todd*.

— *committing*.—Lat. *committere* = to match,  
to pair, to bring together; '*licet Æneam Ruta-*  
*lumque ferocem Committas.*'—*Juv.* 1. 162. *Com-*  
*mitting*, as here employed, belongs to a class of  
words derived from the Latin, which Milton uses  
in the sense of their Latin original, and not in  
the sense which they have acquired in English;  
*e.g.*, *illustrious* for *bright*, *P. L.* 10. 367; *elate* for  
*lifted on high*, *implicit* for *entangled*, *succinct* for  
*girded*, *spirited* for *inspired*, see F. W. Newman,  
*Lectures*, p. 125.

1. 5, *exempts thee from the throng*—'*secernunt*  
*populo.*'—*Hor., Carm.* 1. 1. 32.

1. 7, *thou shalt be writ*—'*scriberis Vario fortis*  
*et hostium victor.*'—*Hor., Carm.* 1. 6. 1.

1. 11, *hymn or story*.—A marginal note to  
the sonnet as it stands in Lawes' *Choice Psalmes*,

1645, is 'the story of Ariadne set by him to music.'

I. 13, *his Casella*.—So Dante addresses him 'Casella mio,' *Purg.* 2. 91. 'Casella, a Florentine celebrated for his skill in music, in whose company, says Landino, Dante often recreated his spirits, wearied by severer studies.'—Burney, *Hist. of Music*, 2. 322.—Carey.

— *whom he wooed to sing*.—Dante asks for a soothing air to console his spirit, weighed down with pain and sorrow:—

*'Se nuova legge non ti toglie  
Memoria o uso all' amoroso canto,  
Che mi solea quetar tutte mie voglie  
Di ciò ti piaccia consolare alquanto  
L'anima mia, che con la sua persona  
Venendo qui, è affannata tanto.'*

—*Purg.* 2. 106.

On this invitation Casella sings a canzone from the *Convito* of Dante, beginning 'Amor che nella mente mi ragiona.'

I. 14, *milder shades*—i.e., Purgatory by comparison with Hell.

1646. æt. 38.

*On the religious memory of Mrs. Catherine Thom<sup>a</sup>pson,  
my christian friend, deceased 16 Dec. 1646.*

WHEN Faith and Love, which parted from thee  
never,

Had ripened thy just soul to dwell with God,  
Meekly thou didst resign this earthy load  
Of death, called life, which us from life doth sever.  
Thy works and alms, and all thy good endeavour,  
Stayed not behind, nor in the grave were trod ;  
But, as Faith pointed with her golden rod,  
Followed thee up to joy and bliss for ever.  
Love led them on ; and Faith, who knew them best  
Thy handmaids, clad them o'er with purple beams  
And azure wings, that up they flew so drest,  
And speak the truth of thee on glorious themes  
Before the Judge ; who thenceforth bid thee rest,  
And drink thy fill of pure immortal streams.

SONNET 15.

‘**O**N the religious memory of Mrs. Catherine Thomson, my christian friend, deceased Dec. 16, ‘1646.’ This heading, which is not in the edition of 1673, is supplied from the Cambridge MS. Of Mrs. Catherine Thomson nothing is otherwise known. Mistress was the title given to an unmarried woman. The present sonnet and Sonnet 10 should be compared with Sonnets 3 and 5, as showing how far the poet had at this date left behind him the Petrarchian conception of woman. Milton’s sensibility to the attraction is not less than it was, but it now fastens on the mental qualities which constitute the beautiful soul,—the graces of person and accomplishments of education are not alluded to. That the growing virtues of the young lady of Sonnet 10, and the ‘ripened soul’ of Mrs. Catherine Thomson are valued by a theological standard, shows the gradual ascendancy which Puritanism was gaining over Milton’s moral judgment.



1. 2, *ripened*.—A favourite metaphor with Milton for denoting growth, physical or moral. Physical growth; *Com.* 59; moral growth, *P. R.* 331, *Sonnet*, 2. 7.

1. 4, *death called life*. From Petrarch, *Vita*, son. 161, 'questa morte che si chiama vita.'

1. 7, *golden rod*.—The staff of office of Athene in Homer, χρυσέῃ ῥάβδῳ, *Od.* 16, 172, is transferred to Faith as the door-keeper whose task it is to usher souls into the Presence. Somnus has the 'golden rod' in the Latin poets, copied by Drummond 'as he That holds the 'golden rod, and moral chain,' p. 9; 'Sleep . . . ' thrice me touching with his rod of gold,' p. 13. The 'golden wand' is given by Spenser, 6. 7. 13, to the Titaness Mutability; by Campbell, *Pleasures of Hope*, part i., to Hope. Wordsworth gives silver wands to the saints—'to which the 'silver wands of saints in heaven Might point 'with rapturous joy.'—*Prel.* p. 310.

1. 10, *purple beams And azure wings*—cf. Ronsard,

**Hymne 2, 'deux frères emplumez qui d'une aile  
' dorée Peintes à lames d'azur.'**

1. 12, *speak*.—So ed. 1673, and has been replaced by Masson instead of 'spake,' a correction made by the early editors.

1. 14, *And drink thy fill of pure immortal streams*—cf. Psalm 36. 8, 'Thou shalt make them  
' drink of the river of thy pleasures.' *Epitaph. Damon.* 205—'Heroumque animas inter divosque  
' perennes Æthereos haurit latices et gaudia potat  
' ore sacro.'

JULY-AUG. 1648. ÆT. 40.

*On the Lord General Fairfax at the siege of  
Colchester.*

FAIRFAX, whose name in arms through Europe  
rings,

Filling each mouth with envy or with praise,  
And all her jealous monarchs with amaze,  
And rumours loud that daunt remotest kings ;  
Thy firm unshaken virtue ever brings  
Victory home, though new rebellions raise  
Their Hydra heads, and the false North displays  
Her broken league to imp their serpent-wings.  
O yet a nobler task awaits thy hand  
(For what can war but endless war still breed ?)  
Till truth and right from violence be freed,  
And public faith cleared from the shameful brand  
Of public fraud. In vain doth valour bleed,  
While avarice and rapine share the land.

SONNET 16.

THIS is one of four sonnets not included in the edition of 1673, as from the nature of the subject it could not be. They were first published, incorrectly, by Phillips, in 1694, in his translation of Milton's *State Letters*.

The Siege of Colchester, thus commemorated by Milton, was not an isolated action, but, together with the battle of Preston, formed the culminating point of the general royalist rising in 1648. The town was invested 13 June, and surrendered 27 August, after having endured the extremity of famine. The most desperate of the royalist leaders had retreated there, and this capture put an end to the insurrection in favour of the king, now a prisoner in the Isle of Wight. This sonnet expresses the joy of Milton and the independents at the successful conclusion of what has been called the 'Second Civil War.'

Of the many applications which have been made of the sonnet form, none is more appropriate than when it is the vehicle of personal compli-

ment, panegyric, or congratulation. The narrow limits within which the eulogy must be brought to a close, makes it tolerable. We have only to compare the effect of Ronsard's long *Hymnes* in honour of the princes and nobles of the court, to see how inevitably diluted praise becomes offensive flattery.

1. 1, *Fairfax*.—As there have been twenty-one Lord Fairfaxes, of whom eight were Thomas, Lord Fairfax, it may be useful to note that the person here addressed is the third lord, who may be deservedly distinguished as the great Lord Fairfax. Born in 1612, he succeeded to the title and estates on the death of his father Ferdinando, the second lord, in March 1648. In March 1645 he was appointed commander-in-chief of all the forces of the Commonwealth. To his military skill, consummate prudence, and prompt energy in action, the success of the arms of the Parliament was mainly owing. He was also a man of cultivated mind, and a poet. On the surrender of Oxford in June 1646, his first care was to save the Bodleian from pillage, and at a

later time he promoted the restoration of study and discipline in the university, which had been suspended and almost destroyed during the royalist occupation.

It is significant of a special regard for Fairfax, that Milton forgave him for deserting the cause in 1649. In his *Tenure of Kings*, when Milton is scornful towards the backsliders, he abstains from naming Fairfax; see the passage, *P. W.* 2. 453—‘Another sort there is,’ &c. And in 1654, in the *Defensio Secunda*, he apostrophises Fairfax, including him among the other chiefs of the Revolution.

— *whose name in arms through Europe rings*—  
*cf.* Surrey, p. 35, ed. 1717—‘Darius, of whose  
‘power all Asie rang.’ Ariosto, *Orl. Fur.*, Harrington’s transl., 1607—‘Of whose great triumphs  
‘all the world shall ring.’

1. 3, *ever brings victory home*.—Though the credit of the parliamentary triumph has been popularly attached to the greater name of Oliver Cromwell, it was to Fairfax that it was in great measure due. It was he who organised the army

on the new model in 1645, who won the decisive day of Naseby, reduced Bristol and Colchester, and suppressed the mutiny in May 1649.

1. 6, *new rebellions raise Their hydra-heads—*  
*cf.* Malherbe, 1. p. 262—‘Que l’hydre de la  
‘France, en revolte féconde.’ *Hydra*—because as  
soon as one was cut off, another, or several,  
sprung up in its place. The invasion of England  
by the Scottish army under the Duke of Hamilton,  
in the summer of 1648, led to concerted royalist  
insurrections in Wales, Kent, and the west of  
England. Cromwell suppressed the Welsh rising,  
and Fairfax speedily cooped the Kentish insurgents  
up in Colchester. It was during this siege that  
the sonnet was written.

1. 7, *the false north displays Her broken league.—*  
The Scotch had broken their alliance with the  
Parliament, and were marching an army into  
England in support of the royalist insurgents.

1. 9, *to imp their serpent wings—*imp = shoot,  
scion, any new member added on. ‘And so

‘those imps which might in time have sprung  
 ‘aloft and served to shield the state.’—Gascoigne,  
*Steel Glass*, 455. ‘And with it, impeded the wings  
 ‘of fame.’—Carew, Southey’s *Poets*, p. 732.  
 ‘While some new Homer imping wings to fame.’  
 —Drummond, *Tears*, &c.

—*serpent wing*.—Milton, a diligent reader of Euripides, makes the Lernean Hydra a winged serpent; so Euripides alone of all the classical writers, *Ion*, 195. In this passage the epithet seemed so improper to Pierson, that he proposed to alter *πτερόν*, ‘winged,’ into *καρόν*.

1. 14, *avarice and rapine share the land*.—The army leaders charged the Parliament with jobbery, especially with taking bribes from royalist gentlemen to let them off easily in compounding for their estates. Of course there was a good deal of self-seeking; and this was intolerable to Milton, to whom the cause was the cause of God and the saints. He writes in 1649—‘The hope of  
 ‘being classic and provincial lords led them on,  
 ‘while pluralities greased them thick and deep, to  
 ‘the shame and scandal of religion, more than all



‘ the sects and heresies they exclaim against.’—  
*Tenure of Kings, P. W.*, 2. 454. He reiterates  
the charge again and again, see *P. W.* 4. 292—  
‘ Comoda alii, alii honores, ad se trahebant ; me  
‘ nemo ambientem, nemo per amicos quicquam  
‘ petentem . . . unquam vidit.’



(MAY) 1652. ÆT. 44.

CROMWELL, our chief of men, who through a cloud  
 Not of war only, but detractions rude,  
 Guided by faith and matchless fortitude,  
 To peace and truth thy glorious way hast ploughed,  
 And on the neck of crowned fortune proud  
 Hast reared God's trophies, and his work pursued,  
 While Darwen stream, with blood of Scots im-  
     brued,  
 And Dunbar field, resound thy praises loud,  
 And Worcester's laureate wreath ; yet much remains  
 To conquer still ; peace hath her victories  
 No less renowned than war ; new foes arise  
 Threatening to bind our souls with secular chains.  
 Help us to save free conscience from the paw  
 Of hireling wolves, whose gospel is their maw.

### SONNET 17.

**T**HIS sonnet, as Masson has pointed out, is not to be read as a general testimony of Milton's admiration for Cromwell. It was addressed, perhaps sent, to Cromwell on a special emergency, of which the two last lines give the key. The moment was one when the question of a 'maintenance for a godly ministry' was the uppermost question. The Presbyterian party, especially strong in London and Lancashire, wanted a state-supported church and tithes, or a provision in lieu of tithes, while the Independent party regarded with aversion any interference of the secular arm with spiritual things. The extreme view, shared by Milton, went so far as to look upon payment for spiritual ministration as contrary to the gospel.

This sonnet was also first published by Phillips in 1694, but with the prudential suppression of the whole line, 'and on the neck of crowned

'fortune proud,' and the substitution in the next line of 'fought God's battles' for 'reared God's trophies.' This arbitrary alteration of Edward Phillips is an illustration of the licence which editors allowed themselves in dealing with texts, as well as of the fine lines which separate what you may say at a given period from what may not be said.

*The committee for propagation of the gospel* was a committee of the Rump Parliament. It consisted of fourteen members, and had general administrative duties in church affairs, specially that of supplying spiritual destitution in the parishes. The *proposals of certain ministers* were fifteen proposals offered to the committee by John Owen, and other well-known ministers, in which they asked that the preachers should receive a public maintenance.

1. 1, *our chief of men*.—At the date of this sonnet, May 1652, the recent victories of Dunbar, September 1650, and Worcester, September 1651, had marked out Cromwell as master of the political situation. To Milton Cromwell was

*chief of men*, in respect of his personal qualities and thoroughgoing liberality of opinion, and not merely as the foremost man in the Commonwealth. Aubrey says that the two personages whom foreigners coming to London asked to be shown, were Oliver Cromwell and John Milton. There is no evidence for the tradition of Milton ever having been in personal relations with the Protector.

— *a cloud*—so ‘*nubem belli*.’—Virg. *Æn.* 10. 809. Phillips printed *crowd*, and in the next line for *detractions* he gave *distractions*. If one transcription could produce such errors, we need not wonder that centuries of copying should have corrupted the text of the Greek and Latin classics as they came down to the printing press in the fifteenth century.

1. 5, *neck of crowned fortune*—a biblical phrase, see Gen. 49. 8—*thy band shall be in the neck of thy enemies*. Ps. 40.—*thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies*. But in both places the Hebrew word used means *back*, and is so translated by the LXX. In biblical phraseology

the hand or the foot of the conqueror is on the back of his 'prostrate' foe. When Milton rears trophies *on the neck*, the expression has ceased to be a picturesque metaphor, and become a formula.

l. 7, *Darwen stream*.—The Darwen, once a river, now a ditch, rises near Over Darwen, in the range of hills between Bolton and Blackburn, in Lancashire. The Darwen flows into the Ribble above Preston, but from the south side. Pope has imitated Milton—'And silent Darent stained  
' with Danish blood.'—*Past. Windsor For.* 348.  
'Darwent's storied stream' in *De Clifford*, p. 8, is the Yorkshire, not the Lancashire Derwent; 'storied' because of the battle of Stamford Bridge, in which Harold Harfager, King of Norway, was defeated and slain.

l. 10, *peace bath her victories*—cf. Milton's proposals for occupying the time of respite from war with those of Ronsard—

' *Après la guerre il faut qu'on remette en usage  
' Les muses et Phœbus, et que leur bande asserre*

‘ *Des chappeaux de laurier, de myrte et de lierre,*  
‘ *Pour ceux qui vous feront present d’un bel ouvrage.*’  
*Sonnets divers, 5. 303.*

and Tennyson—‘ For one so true, There must be  
‘ other, nobler, work to do, Than when he fought  
‘ at Waterloo.’—*Ode on Death of the Duke of Wel-*  
*lington.*

l. 11, *new foes*.—Owen and his fellow-peti-  
tioners, who, though Independents, did not main-  
tain in its purity the principle of spiritual inde-  
pendency, and were thus *new foes* in addition to  
the old foes, the Presbyterians.

l. 14, *whose gospel is their maw*.—This con-  
clusion of a noble apostrophe seemed to Warton,  
and seems to many still, an anticlimax. Such it  
would be were the whole sonnet regarded as  
dedicated by its author to the commemoration of  
Cromwell, in the same way that the lines on  
Shakspeare are the expression of Milton’s general  
homage. This, however, is not the case. The  
sonnet is a special appeal to Cromwell, in a par-



ticular case; the case, namely, described in its title—‘The proposals of certain ministers at the ‘committee for the propagation of the Gospel.’ It is an appeal to Cromwell as the most powerful man in the state, to interfere and check the apparent willingness of the Rump parliament to establish a new state church. The exhortation to Cromwell to use his influence against this threatened measure, is the motive of the sonnet to which the commemoration of Cromwell’s victories leads up. Nor are the last words, ‘*whose gospel is their maw,*’ a mere vulgar insinuation that the Presbyterian ministers were grasping at the loaves and fishes of the disendowed church; they are an expression of Milton’s abhorrence of payment for spiritual ministrations. That spiritual gifts should not, and could not be exercised for money, was one of Milton’s fixed convictions. He entertained it already when he wrote in *Lycidas*, 1637, ‘Of other care they little reckon-  
‘ing make, Than how to scramble at the shearers’  
‘feast.’ He repeated it in 1647, ‘it would be  
‘good if they hated pluralities, and left rambling  
‘from benefice to benefice, like ravenous wolves

‘ seeking where they may devour the biggest.’—  
*Tenure of Kings, P. W.*, 2. 488; and he is still  
emphatic in enforcing the same principle when  
he wrote his *Considerations touching the means to  
remove hirelings out of the church* in 1659.

3 JULY 1652.

*To Sir Henry Vane, the Younger.*

VANE, young in years, but in sage counsel old,  
Than whom a better senator ne'er held  
The helm of Rome, when gowns, not arms, repelled  
The fierce Epirot and the African bold;  
Whether to settle peace, or to unfold  
The drift of hollow states hard to be spelled;  
Then to advise how war may, best upheld,  
Move by her two main nerves, iron and gold,  
In all her equipage: besides to know  
Both spiritual power and civil, what each means,  
What severs each, thou hast learned, which few  
have done:  
The bounds of either sword to thee we owe:  
Therefore on thy firm hand religion leans  
In peace, and reckons thee her eldest son.

### SONNET 18.

**T**HIS sonnet was inserted in this place after that on Cromwell, by the editors in the 18th century. Its exact date is ascertained from a statement in George Sikes' *Life and Death of Sir H. Vane*, 1662, in which the sonnet was printed for the first time with the date, 3 July 1652.

Sir H. Vane, the younger, was son of Sir Henry Vane of Raby Castle, co. Durham, who had been chief secretary of state to Charles I. Sir H. Vane, *the younger*, as he used to be spoken of till the death of his father in 1654, presented a different side to Lord Clarendon, who says of him—"He was a man not to be described by any 'character of religion, in which he had swallowed 'some of the fancies and extravagances of every 'sect or faction, and was become, what cannot be 'expressed by any other language than was peculiar to that time, "a man above ordinances," 'unlimited and unrestrained by any rules or 'bounds prescribed to other men, by reason of 'his perfection. He was a perfect enthusiast, and

‘ did believe himself inspired ; which so far corrupted his reason and understanding, which in all matters without the verge of religion was superior to that of most men, that he did at some time believe he was the person deputed to reign over the saints upon earth for a thousand years.’—*Hist. of Reb.* 7. 373. In another place, however, Clarendon, *ibid.* 1. 328, finds the key to Vane’s politics, not in religious exaltation, but in the mundane fact that the title of Baron of Raby was taken by the Earl of Strafford to himself.

Vane is included by Wordsworth in his enumeration of Milton’s friends—

‘ Great names have been among us ; hands that  
 penned  
 ‘ And tongues that uttered wisdom ; better none ;  
 ‘ The later Sidney, Marvel, Harrington,  
 ‘ Young Vane, and others who called Milton friend.’

Sonnet 15, *Works*, 3. 69.

1. 1, *young in years*.—Vane, born 1612, was consequently forty at date of this sonnet.

l. 1, *but in sage counsel bold*—cf. Sylvester, *Du Bartas*, p. 338—‘Isaac, in years young, but in  
‘wisdom grown.’

l. 3, *gowns not arms*.—A trite antithesis among the Latin writers from Cicero downwards. See Heyne on Virg. *Æn.* 1. 282, and Ov. *Met.* 15. 747.

l. 4, *The fierce Epirot and the African bold*.—Pyrrhus, *repelled* B.C. 279, and Hannibal. Byron, *Childe Harold*, 3. 110, turned this into ‘fierce Carthaginian.’ In saying that Pyrrhus and Hannibal were overcome by *gowns not arms*, Milton means, what is certainly true, that the fighting power of Rome could not have coped with these invaders had it not been directed by the administrative ability of the senate. Duruy, *Hist. des Romains*, 1. 420, says of Hannibal, in B.C. 203, ‘il se sentait vaincu par quelque chose  
‘de plus fort que son génie, les mœurs et les  
‘institutions de Rome.’

l. 8, *her two main nerves*.—‘War is not so

‘much an affair of arms, as of expenditure,’ Archidamus is made to say by Thucydides, 1. 83; and Pericles, *Tbucyd.* 2., repeats the sentiment, ‘success in war depends on good counsel and ‘superior wealth.’ Tacitus, *Hist.* 4. 74, puts into the mouth of Cerealis the words, ‘quies sine armis, neque arma sine stipendiis.’ Cicero repeats the saying, *Philipp.* 5. 2, after Crantor, *Sext Emp.*, p. 702, or Bion, *Diog. Laert.* 4. 48. Plutarch, *Cleom.* 27, had forgotten who first coined the saying, which had in his time become a household word, as it has continued with us, ‘sinews of war.’

1. 11, *thou hast learned, which few have done.*—Here Milton becomes not only prosaic, but unmetrical.

Political difficulties arising out of the relation of church and state had been practically experienced by Vane in Massachusetts during his short governorship in 1636.

1. 12, *of either sword.*—There is then, according to Milton, a spiritual sword to smite heretics,

*i.e.*, papists, for Milton's toleration expressly excludes 'idolatry;' see his tract, *Of True Religion*, *P. W.*, 3. 413. The two swords together make up the 'two-handed engine at the door' in *Lycidas*.



*On the late Massacre in Piedmont.*

**A**VENGE, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose  
bones

Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold ;  
Even them, who kept thy truth so pure of old,  
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,  
Forget not : in thy book record their groans,  
Who were thy sheep, and in their ancient fold  
Slain by the bloody Piemontese, that rolled  
Mother with infant down the rocks ; their moans  
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they  
To heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow  
O'er all the Italian fields, where still doth sway  
The triple tyrant ; that from these may grow  
A hundredfold, who, having learnt thy way,  
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

SONNET 19.

‘ **T**HE inhabitants of certain Piedmontese valleys  
‘ had held from time immemorial, and long before  
‘ Luther, tenets and forms of worship very like  
‘ those to which the German reformers had  
‘ sought to bring back the Church. The  
‘ Vaudois were wretchedly poor, and had been  
‘ incessantly the objects of aggression and perse-  
‘ cution. In January 1655, a sudden determina-  
‘ tion was taken by the Turin government to  
‘ make them conform to the Catholic religion by  
‘ force. The whole of the inhabitants of three  
‘ valleys were ordered to quit the country, within  
‘ three days, under pain of death and confiscation  
‘ of goods, unless they would become, or under-  
‘ take to become, Catholic. They sent their  
‘ humble remonstrances to the Court of Turin  
‘ against this edict. The remonstrances were  
‘ disregarded, and military execution was ordered.  
‘ On April 17, 1655, the soldiers, recruits from  
‘ all countries—the Irish are especially mentioned

‘—were let loose upon the unarmed population.  
‘ Murder, and rape, and burning are the ordinary  
‘ incidents of military execution. These were  
‘ not enough to satisfy the ferocity of the Catholic  
‘ soldiery, who revelled for many days in the  
‘ infliction of all that brutal lust or savage cruelty  
‘ can suggest to men.

‘ It was nearly a month before the news reached  
‘ England. A cry of horror went through the  
‘ country, and Cromwell said it came “as near  
‘ “his heart as if his own nearest and dearest had  
‘ “been concerned.” A day of humiliation was  
‘ appointed, large collections were made for the  
‘ sufferers, and a special envoy was despatched to  
‘ remonstrate with the Duke of Savoy. . . . .  
‘ All the despatches in this business were written  
‘ in Latin by Milton. The tone of them is more  
‘ moderate than we should have expected, con-  
‘ sidering that Blake was in the Mediterranean,  
‘ and master of the sea-coast. Thus restricted by  
‘ diplomatic propriety in his official communica-  
‘ tions, Milton gave vent to his feelings in this  
‘ sonnet.’—*Life of Milton*, by Mark Pattison, p.  
126.

l. 1, *whose bones lie scattered*. — ‘Why he,  
‘after seven years’ warring and destroying of his  
‘best subjects, . . . in respect of whom so many  
‘thousand Christians destroyed should lie unac-  
‘counted for, polluting with their slaughtered  
‘cariones all the land over, and crying for ven-  
‘geance.’—*Tenure of Kings*, *P. W.*, 2. 467.

l. 2, *on the Alpine mountains cold*—cf. Fairfax,  
*Tasso*, 13. 60—‘Distilled from tops of Alpine  
‘mountains cold,’ and *Propert.* 1. 21. 9—‘quæ-  
‘cunque super dispersa invenerit ossa Montibus  
‘Etruscis.’

l. 4, *worshipped stocks and stones*. — Idolatry  
is the charge which Milton most insists upon, as  
the offensive element in the faith and practice of a  
Catholic. In the tract of *True Religion*, 1659, he  
lays down that the reason for excepting Popery  
from general toleration is solely because it is  
idolatrous.—*P. W.*, 3. 413.

l. 7, *That rolled mother with infant down the  
rocks*.—Sir William Moreland, Cromwell’s agent

in Piedmont, published a minute account of the massacre, London, 1658, illustrated with cuts. One of the illustrations is of the incident here alluded to. 'A mother was hurled down a mighty rock with a little infant in her arms; and three days after was found dead with the child alive, but fast claspt between the arms of the mother, which were cold and stiff, insomuch that those that found them had much ado to get the child out.'

l. 10, *Their martyred blood and ashes sow.*—  
'Plures efficimur, quoties metimur a vobis; semen est sanguis Christianorum.'—*Tertull. Apol.*, 50.

l. 14, *Babylonian woe.*—Rome was Babylon to the Puritans, who thus understood the Babylon of the Apocalypse and of 1 *Pet.* 5. 13.



1655? ÆT. 47.

*On his Blindness.*

**W**HEN I consider how my light is spent,  
 Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,  
 And that one talent which is death to hide  
 Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent  
 To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
 My true account, lest He returning chide,  
 ‘Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?’  
 I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent  
 That murmur, soon replies, ‘God doth not need  
 ‘Either man’s work or his own gifts. Who best  
 ‘Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state  
 ‘Is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed,  
 ‘And post o’er land and ocean without rest;  
 ‘They also serve who only stand and wait.’

## SONNET 20.

THIS sonnet is conjecturally dated 1655, because in the vol. of 1673 it follows the Piedmontese sonnet.

Milton's sight had been long threatened before it was finally extinguished. In a letter to the Greek Philaras, the agent in London of the Duke of Parma, dated September 1654, Milton says it was ten years, more or less, since he had first found his eyes failing. The blindness had become total probably about March 1652, in which month Weckherlin was appointed by the Council of State to assist Milton as secretary. The calamity was precipitated by his persistence in writing his *Defensio pro populo Anglicano contra Salmasium*, though warned by his physician of the consequences.

The reader will observe that in the present lament, Milton does not bewail his own privation, but insists wholly on the wreck of the heaven-



appointed task to which he considered himself called and set apart.

‘ My often thought is,’ he writes to Philaras, 1654, ‘ that since to all of us are decreed many ‘ days of darkness, as saith the Wise Man, *Eccles.* ‘ 11, 8, my dark thus far, by the singular favour ‘ of Providence, hath been much more tolerable ‘ than that dark of the grave, passed as it hath ‘ been amid leisure and study, cheered by the ‘ visits and conversation of friends.’

1. 2, *ere half my days*.—Taking March 1652 as the date at which the blindness was complete, Milton’s age was forty-four.

— *dark and wide*.—In Milton’s imagination the great size of the habitable globe was a constant element. *Paradise Lost*, 12. 370—‘ and bound ‘ his reign With earth’s wide bounds.’ The epithet here enforces the impression we receive of the helplessness of the blind.

1. 3, *one talent which is death to hide*.—The allusion is to the parable of the talents, *Matt.* 25.

1. 8, *fondly* = foolishly—‘he who to be deemed  
‘A god, leaped fondly into Ætna flames.’—*P. L.*,  
3. 470.

1. 12, *thousands*.—‘Millions of spiritual crea-  
‘tures walk the earth Unseen both when we wake  
‘and when we sleep.’—*P. L.*, 4. 677.

1656-60. ÆT. 48-52.

*To Mr. Lawrence.*

**L**AURENCE, of virtuous father virtuous son,  
 Now that the fields are dank, and ways are mire,  
 Where shall we sometimes meet, and by the fire  
 Help waste a sullen day, what may be won  
 From the hard season gaining? Time will run  
 On smoother, till Favonius reinspire  
 The frozen earth, and clothe in fresh attire  
 The lily and rose that neither sowed nor spun.  
 What neat repast shall feast us, light and choice,  
 Of Attic taste, with wine, whence we may rise  
 To hear the lute well touched, or artful voice  
 Warble immortal notes and Tuscan air?  
 He who of those delights can judge, and spare  
 To interpose them oft, is not unwise.

# SONNET 21.

THE two sonnets 21, 22, are the best, perhaps the only successful, experiments in the lighter style, which Milton has made. His sportive sallies, *e.g.*, 'On the University Carrier,' are clumsy failures, and his raillery, *e.g.*, 'Pro se defensio contra Morum,' brutal insult. His transcript of Horace's 'Ode to Pyrrha' is without any of the ease and grace—the only merit—of the original. In these two sonnets, 21 and 22, he has shown that he could lay his hand gently on the strings, and take it off again. Milton's, indeed, is not the delicate touch of Desaugiers or Béranger, those masters of 'la chose légère;' but what is wanted in suppleness is made up by a dignity and religious resignedness of which the libertine song writer is incapable. The cast of these sonnets as notes of invitation is suggested by Horace, 2 *Carm.* 11, 'Quid bellicosus Cantaber,' &c.

The Lawrence here addressed was one of the sons of Henry Lawrence, President of Cromwell's Council, 1654. Young Lawrence is specially

mentioned by Phillips in his memoir of his uncle, as among the constant visitors at the house in Petty France, Westminster, a house which Milton occupied from 1652 to the Restoration. The President had more than one son, and it is not known which of them is here addressed. Masson has made it probable that it was the second son, Henry, who, in 1656—the earliest date we can assign to this sonnet—would be about twenty. One of the consolations sought for in his calamity by Milton, was the society of young friends, such as Marvell, Needham, Cyriac Skinner, and this Lawrence, who gathered to him, to read to him, write for him, or practise music with him.

l. 1, *of virtuous father, virtuous son*.—Imitated from Horace's 'O matre pulchra, filia pulchrior,' 1 *Carm.* 16; itself said to be imitated from Stesichorus.

l. 2, *ways are mire*.—The London streets of 1656.

l. 3, *Where*.—It is natural to suppose that these meetings were always in Milton's own

house ; but the question here seems to imply that they were elsewhere.

l. 4, *help waste a sullen day* — cf. Hor., 2 *Carm.* 7. 6—‘*morantem sæpe diem mero fregi.*’

l. 6, *Favonius*.—The south-west wind which introduces the spring—‘*solvitur acris hiems grata*’ ‘*vice veris et Favoni.*’—Hor. 1. *Carm.*, 4. 1.

l. 9, *What neat repast shall feast us, light and choice?*—Milton commonly studied till twelve, then used some exercise for an hour, then dined. After dinner came music, when he either sung himself or made his wife sing, to accompany him on the organ or bass viol. After music he studied again till six ; then entertained his visitors till eight, when came a slight supper. In his diet he was temperate, desiring it light and choice. Of wine he drank little ; but after a pipe of tobacco and a glass of water retired to bed at nine.

l. 13, *Spare To interpose them oft*.—It might seem unnecessary, had not the sense of these words been misunderstood, to say that their meaning is, Will use them sparingly.

1656-60. ÆT. 48-52.

*To Cyriack Skinner.*

CYRIACK, whose grandsire on the royal bench  
Of British Themis, with no mean applause,  
Pronounced, and in his volumes taught, our laws,  
Which others at their bar so often wrench ;  
To-day deep thoughts resolve with me to drench  
In mirth that, after, no repenting draws ;  
Let Euclid rest, and Archimedes pause,  
And what the Swede intends, and what the French.  
To measure life learn thou betimes, and know  
Towards solid good what leads the nearest way ;  
For other things mild Heaven a time ordains,  
And disapproves that care, though wise in show,  
That with superfluous burden loads the day,  
And, when God sends a cheerful hour, refrains.

SONNET 22.

CYRIACK SKINNER was son of a Lincolnshire squire, William Skinner, and Bridget, a daughter of Sir Edward Coke. Cyriac had been a pupil of Milton's, and was now a republican lawyer, and a leading member of Harrington's debating club, called 'The Rota,' which held its meetings at the Turk's Head in Palace Yard. Cyriac Skinner was about Milton as early as 1656, in which year he made his compliments to Oldenburg in a letter dictated by Milton. Daniel Skinner, who at a later period acted as Milton's amanuensis, and transcribed for the press the first 196 pages of the *De doctrina Christiana*, may have been a nephew of this Cyriac Skinner.

1. 1, *whose grandsire*.—Sir Edward Coke married a wealthy heiress, Bridget Preston, of an old Norfolk family. By her he had ten children, of whom the second daughter, Bridget, was married to William Skinner.

1. 3, *in his volumes taught our laws*.—Coke's legal treatises are numerous; the best known are



his *Institutes* in four parts, and his *Reports* in thirteen volumes.

1. 3, *mirth that after, no repenting draws*.—Warton compares *Martial*, 10. 46—‘*Nox non ebria, sed soluta curis.*’

1. 7, *Let Euclid rest, and Archimedes pause*.—This Skinner, therefore, whom A. Wood describes in 1659 as ‘an ingenious young gentleman,’ was a mathematical student. He doubtless shared in the movement towards physical experiment, and science generally, which began a little before 1650, though his name is not in the list of forty persons who were suggested in November 1660 as possible members of the Royal Society then projected.—See Weld, *Hist. of R. Soc.* 1. 66. Perhaps his republican politics disqualified him.

1. 8, *And what the Swede intends*.—Skinner’s interests are indicated as divided between foreign politics and mathematics. Burns, 1790, wants a newspaper to tell him ‘How the collieshangie  
‘works Atween the Russians and the Turks; Or  
‘if the Swede, before he halt, Would play anither  
‘Charles the twalt?’

1. 8, *intends*—‘intend,’ ed. 1673; ‘intends,’ MS. Trin. Coll.

1. 9-14. — With these lines *cf.* Montaigne, *Ess.* 3. 5—‘à mesure que les pensements utiles  
‘ sont plus pleins et solides, ils sont aussiz plus  
‘ empeschants, et plus onereux. Il faut avoir  
‘ l’âme instruite des moyens de soubstenir et com-  
‘ battre les maulx, et instruite des regles de bien  
‘ vivre. . . . Mais à une âme de commune sorte  
‘ il faut que ce soit avec relasche et moderation;  
‘ elle s’affolle d’estre trop continuellement bandée.’

In this invitation to his friend to quit for a day the noisy turbulence of club politics, Milton tacitly includes himself, fretted by his duties in attending the Council of State as Latin secretary, translating despatches which conveyed resolves, in deliberating on, and framing, which he had no share.

1. 11, *For other things mild beaven a time ordains.*  
‘ *Aussi ne faut tousjours languir embesoigné*  
‘ *Sous le soucy publicq, ny porter renfrognè*  
‘ *Tousjours un triste front ; il faut qu’on se defasche,*  
‘ *Et que l’arc trop tendu quelquefois on delasche.*’

Ronsard, *Les Hymnes*, 1. 5.

1655. ÆT. 47.

*To the same.*

CYRIACK, this three years' day these eyes, though  
clear,

To outward view, of blemish or of spot,  
Bereft of light, their seeing have forgot ;  
Nor to their idle orbs doth sight appear  
Of sun, or moon, or star, throughout the year,  
Or man, or woman. Yet I argue not  
Against Heaven's hand or will, nor bate a jot  
Of heart or hope, but still bear up and steer  
Right onward. What supports me, dost thou ask ?  
The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied  
In Liberty's defence, my noble task,  
Of which all Europe talks from side to side.  
This thought might lead me through the world's  
vain mask,  
Content, though blind, had I no better guide.

SONNET 23.

**IF** March 1652 be rightly assigned as the date at which the blindness became total, then this sonnet was written in March 1655. In the Trin. Coll. MS. this sonnet follows Sonnet 22 ; but the nature of its contents excluded it from the edition of 1673.

1. 1, *this three years' day*.—It has been proposed to read 'three years this day' by critics who find 'this three years' day' not grammatical. Oakley, *Notes and Queries*, 4th ser., 10. 77, justly says of the proposed inversion that it would rightly have its place in the 'diary of some common-place 'proser.' Parallels for the idiom have been found: 'I saw not better sport these seven years' day.'—Shaksp., 2 *Henry VI.*, 2. 1. 'What say you to a merry knave that for this two years' day hath not been talked of.'—Chettle, *Kind Hart's Dream*.

— *though clear*.—Milton had been handsome in his youth, and in this sonnet, æt. 47,

shows himself solicitous about his personal appearance. The taunts of his enemies about 'the 'lack-lustre eye guttering with prevalent rheum' were aimed at this little vanity. In the *Def. Sec.*, *P. W.*, 4. 267, 1654, Milton has put on record a description of his own personal appearance. Of his eyes he writes—'They are externally uninjured; they shine with a clear unclouded light, just like the eyes of those whose vision is 'most acute.' In later years, when the exordium of Book iii. of *Paradise Lost* was composed, this little touch of vanity has disappeared, as incompatible with the solemn dignity of the occasion. The Trin. Coll. MS. has *clean*.

1. 4, *orbs*. — Here correctly used = 'ball, 'circle, globe.' It is *their orbs* here and in *P. L.*, 3. 25, after Virg., 'oculorum orbes,' *Æn.*, 12. 670, and *θυμῶν κύκλος*, Soph., *Ant.* 974. In *Sam. Ag.*, 591, used absolutely—'these dark 'orbs no more shall treat with light.'

1. 7, *nor hate a jot of heart or hope*.—This was

in 1655-6; compare the tone with the post-restoration tone of 1666—

‘ *Nor am I in the list of those that hope,  
‘ Hopeless are all my evils, all remediless.*’

*Sam. Ag.*, 647.

1. 11, *my noble task, Of which all Europe talks from side to side.*—‘Milton consoles himself with ‘the fancy that in his pamphlet, the *Defensio*, he ‘had done a great work, *quanta maxima quivi*, ‘for his country. This poor delusion helped him ‘doubtless to support his calamity. He could ‘not foresee that, in less than ten years, the ‘great work would be totally annihilated, his ‘pamphlet would be merged in the obsolete mass ‘of civil war tracts, and the *Defensio*, on which ‘he had expended his last year of eyesight, only ‘mentioned because it had been written by the ‘author of *Paradise Lost*.’—*Life of Milton*, by Mark Pattison, p. 111.

— *talks*—so the Trin. Coll. MS. Phillips, 1694, printed ‘*rings*,’ a word which may naturally have occurred to Milton, but which if it did, he must have rejected as exaggerative.

1658? ÆT. 50.

*On his deceased Wife.*

**M**ETHOUGHT I saw my late espoused saint  
Brought to me, like Alcestis, from the grave,  
Whom Jove's great son to her glad husband gave,  
Rescued from Death by force, though pale and faint.  
Mine, as whom washed from spot of child-bed taint  
Purification in the old law did save,  
And such as yet once more I trust to have  
Full sight of her in heaven without restraint,  
Came vested all in white, pure as her mind.  
Her face was veiled ; yet to my fancied sight  
Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined  
So clear, as in no face with more delight.  
But O ! as to embrace me she inclined  
I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.

SONNET 24.

MILTON, described in the register of S. Mary, Aldermanbury, as of the parish of Margaret's, in Westminster, was married to Mrs. Catherine Woodcock on 12 November 1656. She was daughter of Captain Woodcock of Hackney, of whom, or his family, nothing has been ascertained. She died in child-birth, February 1658, her baby following her in a month's time. 'Milton's private life, for eighteen years now, 'had certainly not been a happy one; but this 'death of his second wife seems to have been 'remembered by him ever afterwards with deep 'and peculiar sorrow. She had been to him, 'during the short fifteen months of this union, 'all that he had thought saint-like and womanly, 'very sympathetic with himself, and maintaining 'such peace and order in his household as had 'not been there till she entered it.'—Masson, *Life of Milton*, 5. 382.

Hallam has pointed out the resemblance between



the present sonnet and one by Berardino Rota  
upon his own wife :—

‘ *In lieto e pien di riverenza aspetto,  
‘ Con veste di color bianco e vermiglio,  
‘ Di doppia luce serenato il ciglio,  
‘ Mi viene in sonno il mio dolce diletto.  
‘ Io me l’ inchino, e con cortese affetto  
‘ Seco ragiono, e seco mi consiglio,  
‘ Com’ abbia a governarmi in quest’ esiglio,  
‘ E piango intant, e la risposta aspetto.  
‘ Ella m’ ascolta fiso, a dice cose  
‘ Veramente celesti, ed io l’ apprendo  
‘ E serbo ancor nella memoria ascose.  
‘ Mi lascia al fine e parte, e va spargendo  
‘ Per l’ aria nel partir viole e rose ;  
‘ Io le porgo la man ; poi mi reprendo.’*



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